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THE "FALLEN WOMAN" IN ENGLISH NOVELS: 1870-1900

Gerda Bos

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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LIFE

Gerda Bos was born in Chicago, Illinois, on February 13, 1918.

She attended public and private schools in Oak Lawn, Illinois, and graduated from the Chicago Christian High School in 1938. In 1942, she received the A. B. degree from Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and thereupon moved to Northern California where she taught high school in the San Joaquin Valley for seven years.

Upon her return to Chicago to teach English at the Chicago Christian High School, Gerda Bos became a student at Loyola University, from which she received her M. A. degree in English in 1957. She began her doctoral studies at Loyola during the same year. Since 1959, she has been an assistant professor of English at Trinity College, in Palos Heights, Illinois.

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INTRODUCTION

Anyone who reads the prefaces and conclusions that Victorian novelists supplied for their books, or the letters they wrote to publishers and friends will discover that to an extent which seems absurd in our day, those authors were restricted, by an unwritten and sometimes fluctuating code, from writing as they wished or as their art demanded. This code controlled a variety of subjects, not the least of which was the presentation of the "fallen woman" in fiction, and its companion subject matter of seduction, prostitution, illegitimacy, bigamy, adultery, and even childbirth. If these subjects were introduced at all, certain conventions had to be observed, but even then the author could rarely be sure that his intentions would be understood or appreciated by critics and/or ordinary readers. His taste, his treatment, even his morals might be called into question.

Still, the fallen woman was an enormously popular subject. In spite of taboos, restrictions, and conventions regarding such matter, every important novelist between 1800 and 1900 introduced a fallen woman and her experiences into one or more of his books. (The term "fallen woman" came into common use during this century to designate a seduced girl, an unfaithful wife, or a prostitute. The Oxford English Dictionary provides the generic definition "one who has surrendered her chastity.") The list of writers reads like a Who's Who of nineteenth-century novelists. Jane

Austen, Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, Mrs. Gaskell, George Meredith, George Eliot, Charles Reade, Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins, Thomas Hardy, and George Moore all used the subject more than once. Less important writers and scribblers exploited it.

Literary historians, while not always in agreement about the extent to which writers were affected by this code, do agree about its existence. Walter Allen discusses the idea of Victorian respectability and its application to the novel:

What we often think of as typically Victorian, especially in its attitude towards sex, had become dominant years before the Queen came to the throne. The tabu on the frank recognition and expression of sex had come into existence slowly and, as it were, almost unawares. It was in 1818 that Thomas Bowdler published his Family Shakespeare, in which, as he stated, 'nothing is added to the original text, but those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read aloud in a family.'

It was the respectable who composed the reading public, and it was for the respectable that the great Victorian novelists wrote. Perhaps they flattered the illusions of their public, encouraged them in their black-and-white view of morals; all of them, to a greater or less degree, were inhibited by the assumptions of their public, and there is a case for maintaining that Thackeray was crippled by them.¹

S. Diana Neill notes the influence of the circulating libraries:

He [the Victorian] was anxious to improve the world in his own way; he detested frivolity and sexual license, especially in literature; and he desired to impose his own clear-cut prejudices on letters. Certain areas of human experience were strictly excluded by a form of prudery that still awaits its final explanation, since before this time it was unknown. An unofficial censorship exercised by the circulating libraries was able to force the literature of the day to conform with

¹

Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (London: Phoenix House, Ltd., 1954), pp. 336-339.

middle-class standards.²

Bradford A. Booth writes that the novelist needs for his stimulation the "cordial of an approving public" and that this required a certain adaptability in the nineteenth century:

To procure that approbation in the Victorian age he [the novelist] had to fall in with current standards, address a "family" audience, and set his seal on conventional morality. This the Victorian novelist was willing to do. So a new public, a middle-class public nurtured on the literary pap of annuals and the Minerva Press, set up the novelist as puppet king and became itself the tyrant of nineteenth-century literature.

Over fiction the tyrant of public opinion ruled with vicious despotism. Particularly harmful was the prudery of the age, which, of course, none of the arts escaped. Thackeray's protest is well known. Even Dickens admitted privately that the rich wine of real life had to be watered for public consumption. The normal conservatism of English morality had been reinforced by the abnormal asceticism of the Methodist revival, and few writers cared to brave the wrath of Mrs. Grundy, especially since the Queen was of the same persuasion.³

In a study of the novels of the eighteen-forties, Kathleen Tillotson asserts that, at least during that decade, the restrictions were generally not harmful to a writer:

At all periods, including our own, novelists have known some limitations, but in the eighteen-forties they were not severe, and what is more important, were seldom felt to be cramping. With very few exceptions, novelists were contented with such limitations as existed, and moved freely within them, or figure-skated along the edge. There was no fatal discrepancy between what the writer wished to say and what his public was willing to let him say; and it is that discrepancy, not limitation in itself, which is damaging to the novel, as Hardy and Henry James were to find. Twenty or thirty years later,

2

S. Diana Neill, A Short History of the English Novel (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1951), p. 139.

3

"Form and Technique in the Novel," The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature, ed. Joseph E. Baker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), pp. 70-71.

Jane Eyre and Mary Barton would have met with far more opposition; in the eighteen-forties they startled, but did not disgust.⁴

These references by no means exhaust the list of writers who have recognized the peculiar demands that were made upon novelists in what is loosely described as the Victorian period. They are sufficient to indicate, however, the general outlines of the situation which confronted a novelist who wished to introduce into his story a woman guilty of violating contemporary sex morality.

While the history of the novel in the nineteenth century shows that various writers (Thackeray, notably) were at odds with conventional limitations, it was not until the last three decades that writers, influenced, no doubt, by reactionary thought in many areas, began to defy the long-established code.⁵ The purpose of this study is to investigate the presentation of fallen women in English novels published between 1870 and 1900. A survey of the treatment given this subject in novels written between 1722 and 1870 precedes the main study to show how restrictions affected their presentation during the early and middle Victorian periods and to indicate how increasingly novelists took to themselves freedom to portray their subject.

⁴ Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 64.

⁵ Richard Stang shows very clearly that there were demands for more freedom throughout the Victorian period and "that the protests against English prudery by no means began in the seventies and eighties with Henry James and George Moore." (The Theory of the Novel in England: 1850-1870 [New York: Columbia University Press, 1959]), pp. 214-215.

CHAPTER I

FALLEN WOMEN IN EARLY NOVELS

The fallen woman, who had had a long career in epic and romance, made her appearance in English novels early in the history of that genre. Two of Daniel Defoe's books, Moll Flanders (1723) and Roxana (1724), purported to be the revelations of women who frankly referred to themselves as whores. The first of these--Moll Flanders's history, told by herself--is a surprisingly candid account related matter-of-factly from the point of view of an old woman who is tired of sinning and wants to give her remaining years to repentance. In language that is frank, but not coarse, and much like that of the King James Version of the Bible, Moll relates experiences that include seduction, bigamy, numerous pregnancies, desertion, incest, and adultery.

In the Preface to his book, Defoe explains that Moll had originally told her story in language somewhat less modest than befitted a penitent and that in the rewriting

All possible care, however, has been taken to give no lewd ideas, no immodest turns in the new dressing up this story; no, not to the worst part of her expressions. To this purpose some of the vicious part of her life, which could not be modestly told, is quite left out, and several other parts are very much shortened. What is left 'tis hoped, will keep the reader serious, even where the story might incline him to be otherwise. . . .

Throughout the infinite variety of this book, this fundamental is most strictly adhered to; there is not a wicked action in any part of it, but is first or last rendered un-

happy and unfortunate; there is not a superlative villain brought upon the stage, but either he is brought to an unhappy end, or brought to be a penitent; there is not an ill thing mentioned but it is condemned, even in the relation, nor a virtuous, just thing, but it carries its praise along with it.⁶

Two things of interest stand out in this Preface: the writer's eagerness not to give offense, and his concern that vice and virtue shall be shown to have their proper rewards. Indeed, for the next one hundred and fifty years, English writers as widely separated from Defoe and from each other as Sir Walter Scott and Anthony Trollope would repeat essentially the same ideas in their prefaces.

Moll Flanders's origin was like that of many a later Nancy or Alice Marwood: of illegitimate birth, acquainted from infancy with misery and crime. More fortunate than most, Moll was raised for Colchester parish by a pious, sober nurse, through whom she came to the attention of kind gentle-folk who took her into their home. There, having acquired an education of sorts, she fell in love with the older son, who declared his love for her and promised to marry her at some future date. Lured by his promises and gifts of gold, she permitted him to seduce her. From the vantage point of many years later, when she tells the story, Moll reflects:

I had a most unbounded stock of vanity and pride, and but a very little stock of virtue. . . . Thus I gave up myself to ruin without the least concern, and am a fair memento to all

young women whose vanity prevails over their virtue.⁷

But when she continues, "Nothing was ever so stupid on both sides,"⁸ it is the economic aspects of the affair that she discusses. Whatever her feelings were at the time the seduction occurred, by the time she tells the story, over fifty years later, the foolish economics of it are uppermost in her mind. If she had been wiser, she would have held out for greater gain; if he had known how cheap she held herself, he would simply have taken her.

Their relationship continued until the younger son of the family announced that he loved her and intended to marry her, regardless of the opposition of his family. To Moll's dismay, the older brother encouraged the match, declaring that marriage with him was out of the question. She finally married the younger brother, but she never stopped loving the older one. In fact, she reports, "I was never in bed with my husband, but I wished myself in the arms of his brother. . . . in short, I committed adultery and incest with him every day in my desires, which, without doubt, was as effectively criminal."⁹

When this husband died, Moll quickly remarried, again for financial reasons. This man deserted her, an event which paved

⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

the way for a series of marriages and affairs, some terminated by death, some otherwise, until she was left in such desperate circumstances that she became a pickpocket, a shop-lifter, a whore, and a burglar--a career that ended only with her arrest and confinement in Newgate. After her trial and sentencing to death, Moll went through a great deal of soul-searching. She reports:

It was now that, for the first time, I felt any real sign of repentance; I now began to look back upon my past life with abhorrence, and having a kind of view into the other side of time, the things of life, as I believe they do with everybody at such a time, began to look with a different aspect, and quite another shape, than they did before.¹⁰

If the reader is skeptical of Moll's pious assertion here, it is because she had repented after almost every one of her misdeeds, and then gone on to engage in more, seemingly not at all changed by her experiences. Arnold Kettle describes this quality as "the very delight of Moll Flanders. Moll is magnificently real, magnificently alive because her moral limitations are caught and paralleled so precisely by the sensibility of the writer. Were Defoe to have seen her from any other point of view the same kind of vitality could not have been achieved."¹¹

Defoe, then, felt no need to manipulate Moll into the kind of repentance that such as she would be incapable of feeling. It is an illustration of what Kettle calls the "vital verisimilitude" of Defoe's novels, a quality which many later novelists would sacrifice in the interest of pointing a moral. Moll was

¹⁰ Ibid., II, 103.

¹¹ Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the Novel (London: Hutchinson House, 1951), I, 56.

true to type when, granted a reprieve, she went to America and made a fortune there, using some of her ill-got gain as capital. At the time of the telling, she is an old woman who has returned to England, she says, "where we resolve to spend the remainder of our years in sincere penitence for the wicked lives we have lived."¹²

The "sincere penitence," needless to say, will not require that she give up the fortune that was based on the wages of sin. Moll will be consistently inconsistent for the remainder of her days. The reader has come to know her from her account as both greedy and generous, as crafty, yet good-hearted, as sensual, but practical, even in her immoral conduct. Incest and bigamy did not disturb her greatly, but she had scruples against taking anything to miscarry. Like many people, she was most repentant when she was being punished. She deplored the fact that parents were careless about bringing up their children, but she gave her own away. She moralized about the folly of human beings and hoped that her robberies would teach them a lesson. Abandoned by her Bath lover, she hesitated to go back to her woman friend, she said, fearing that she might tempt her to more wickedness, but her second reason is a revealing one--she did not want the woman to know she had been "cast off."¹³

Perhaps E. M. Forster summarizes the psychological real-

¹²
Defoe, II, 164.

¹³
Ibid., I, 127.

ism of Moll's character when he says of her:

Whatever she does gives us a slight shock--not the jolt of disillusionment, but the thrill that proceeds from a living being. We laugh at her, but without bitterness or superiority. She is neither hypocrite nor fool. . . .

A nature such as hers cannot for long distinguish between doing wrong and getting caught--for a sentence or two she disentangles them but they insist on blending, and that is why her outlook is so cockney-fied and natural, with 'sich is life' for a philosophy and Newgate in the place of Hell.¹⁴

In 1722 it was possible for Defoe to tell his story of immorality and other wickedness in a manner that would be impossible for his successors in the next century. He could introduce the subjects of seduction, incest, pregnancy, and adultery without hesitation, for his audience accepted these elements in the world in which they lived and, although censorious enough of evil doing, they had not reached the point of pretending that one can root out evil by suppressing discussion of it.

Further, Defoe makes no effort to dispense poetic justice by bringing Moll to an unhappy end as playwrights of his time were fond of doing. Defoe's realistic sense, which permitted Moll a wide range of experiences, must have told him that her career needed no artificial heightening, either for dramatic effect or for didactic purposes. The moral he intended could hardly have been served so well by a miserable death as by a life of "sincere penitence."

If, as John Robert Moore maintains, Defoe's Moll Flanders is probably the first significant literary work to show a sym-

¹⁴

E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1927), pp. 93-94.

thetic understanding of the position of an unprotected woman,¹⁵ it is to Defoe's credit that he did not sentimentalize the picture. His interest in the economic vicissitudes such a woman endures reveals quite another emphasis. In the next century and a half, with the exception of Roxana, and possibly of Becky Sharp, there would not be another heroine who could give such a marvelously complete report of all her financial transactions, beginning with the price of her seduction and concluding with an inventory of her possessions fifty years later. Nor would there be another fallen woman so resilient, so unsentimental about herself, so little inclined to vilify the men who wrong her. To Moll Flanders, life brought trouble and pleasure. The important thing was to make the best of it.

Seventeen years after the appearance of Defoe's book, Samuel Richardson told in Pamela (1740) the story of a young girl who did not surrender her virtue and who was rewarded with a rich husband. But he followed it with a better story, Clarissa (1747-1748), in which a virtuous girl is violated by the profligate heir to a title.

In his Postscript to Clarissa, Samuel Richardson offers his novel as a medicine for the times. He says that:

He has lived to see scepticism and infidelity openly avowed, and even endeavoured to be propagated from the press; the great doctrines of the Gospel brought into question; those

¹⁵ Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 242.

of self-denial and mortification blotted out of the catalogue of Christian virtues; and a taste even to wantonness for outdoor pleasure and luxury, to the general exclusion of domestic as well as public virtue, industriously promoted among all ranks and degrees of people.¹⁶

Since the age seeks entertainment and diversion, he hopes to re-affirm the great Christian teachings by means of his novel, which people will read for amusement, but which will present the truths press and pulpit no longer disseminate. To this end, then, the story of Clarissa is designed. Virtue and virtuous conduct are to be made attractive through a heroine who is almost, but not quite, perfect in the face of overwhelming difficulties and temptations.

Clarissa Harlowe's brother and sister, spurred on at first by pique, later by greed as well, draw their father and reluctant mother into an alliance to marry Clarissa to Mr. Solmes, an immensely wealthy old man, whom she detests. As they imagine increasingly that she wishes to marry Lovelace, a brilliant, not entirely detestable rake, they devise more and more stringent methods to make Clarissa marry the man they have chosen. To escape such a marriage, Clarissa flees the parental home with the assistance of Lovelace, whom she has encouraged slightly. It is the fatal decision, an act of disobedience which puts her ultimately in his power. Lovelace lays siege to Clarissa, inventing one scheme after another to conquer her will and make her submit to him. At last he stoops to drugging her and in that unconscious

16

Samuel Richardson, Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1930), VIII, 307-308.

state rapes her.

But if he thought to have enjoyed a triumph such as he had enjoyed over many other women, he is mistaken in Clarissa. Actually she triumphs over him. Lovelace now wishes to marry her; she reminds him that marriage can never atone for what he has done and says, "But after what I have suffered by thee, it would be criminal in me to wish to bind my soul in covenant to a man so nearly allied to perdition."¹⁷

Richardson's study is not that of a fallen woman but of a virtuous one. What someone else did to Clarissa could in no manner taint her mind or morals. The novel shows good and evil in conflict, but the good is not diminished in the fray. That is why Lovelace's reformed friend Belford says:

O LOVELACE! LOVELACE! had I doubted it before, I should now be convinced, that there must be a WORLD AFTER THIS, to do justice to injured merit, and to punish barbarous perfidy! Could the divine SOCRATES and the divine CLARISSA, otherwise have suffered?¹⁸

This is echoed by Clarissa's friend, Miss Howe, who says, "And we must look to a WORLD BEYOND THIS for the Reward of your Sufferings!"¹⁹

Richardson refused to heed readers' requests that he dispense poetic justice, justifying his action on grounds both Christian and classical. In his Postscript he writes:

¹⁷ Ibid., V, 353.

¹⁸ Ibid., 316.

¹⁹ Ibid., VI, 195.

And after all, what is the Poetical Justice so much contended for by some as the generality of writers have managed it, but another sort of dispensation than that with which God, by Revelation, teaches us, He has thought fit to exercise mankind; whom placing here only in a state of probation, he hath so intermingled good and evil, as to necessitate us to look forward for a more equal dispensation of both?

Addison is Richardson's authority for the practice of the ancients:

We find, that good and evil happen alike unto ALL MEN on this side the grave: And as the principal design of tragedy is to raise commiseration and terror in the minds of the audience, we shall defeat this great end, if we always make Virtue and Innocence happy and successful.²⁰

The question of why Clarissa dies if she is guiltless has often been raised. The answer must be found in Richardson's purpose. Clarissa says, "It is good for me that I was afflicted!"²¹ With Christian resignation she accepts what has happened. As long as she was able, she fought evil. After it touched her person (not her will), she still refused to come to terms with it by marrying Lovelace. Her death is not defeat, nor punishment, but victory. She and all her friends believe that she goes to her reward. By including the deathbeds of the wicked Mrs. Sinclair and Mr. Belton, Richardson affords ample contrast between the death of the righteous and of the wicked.

There are in Clarissa a number of women who answer the description "fallen." In fact, there is a whole brothel full, described by Belford in Letter CCCCVI, as they cluster around the hideous deathbed of Mrs. Sinclair, keeper of the house. These are

²⁰ Ibid., VIII, 309-310.

²¹ Ibid., p. 3.

miserable wretches of the most degraded sort, without attractiveness, and without intelligence.

In the Conclusion, Richardson offers several case histories, or exempla, of "sisters in iniquity." One of these, Sally Martin, illustrates the results of bad bringing up. This spoiled girl had been seduced by Lovelace, survived an abortion, and now lives in the brothel and frustrates all her mother's efforts to redeem her. Another such person is Polly Horton, whose mother encouraged her to read immoral romances which debauched her young mind and prepared her also to become Lovelace's victim and at last an inmate of Mrs. Sinolair's house.

By means of these histories Richardson demonstrates once more the vast gulf that separates his pious heroine from such creatures as these who wilfully seek evil.

Something similar appears in a novel by Richardson's contemporary, Henry Fielding. In his last work, Amelia (1751), interest is centered on Amelia Booth, beautiful and virtuous wife of a likeable, if weak and improvident, army officer. After Amelia and Booth, Fanny Matthews--according to F. Homes Dudden--is "the most brilliantly drawn figure."²² This seductress is a striking contrast to Amelia, who remains a faithful wife despite all attempts that are made to seduce her.²³

²²

Henry Fielding: His Life, Works, and Times (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), II, p. 827.

²³

While Amelia (1751) contains the most complete portrait of a fallen woman, his more famous novel, The History of Tom Jones (1749), has a larger number of them: Molly Seagrim, Mrs. Waters,

Booth and Miss Matthews meet in prison, where they recognize each other as former acquaintances and satisfy each other's curiosity by relating their past histories up to the moment of their incarceration. Miss Matthews begins by reminiscing about a ball they both attended some eight or nine years ago, where they danced together and Booth, she says, showed her attentions which charmed her completely. Then follows her story of a love affair with an officer of dragoons and seduction. Here she interrupts the story to exclaim:

O may my fate be a warning to every woman to keep her innocence, to resist every temptation, since she is certain to repent of the foolish bargain. May it be a warning to her to deal with mankind with care and caution; to shun the least approaches of dishonor, and never to confide too much in the honesty of a man, nor in her own strength, where she has so

Lady Bellaston, Bridget Allworthy, and, temporarily at least, Nancy Miller. Of this group, the first three are cast in the role of temptress; Nancy may be described as a victim; and about Bridget Allworthy there is not enough information to make a judgment possible.

Molly Seagrim, the gamekeeper's daughter, is a bold and handsome girl of sixteen, highly-sexed, and already adept enough to let Tom believe himself the aggressor. The next woman whose bed Tom Jones shares is Mrs. Waters, the middle-aged mistress of an army captain. Her sighs, glances, and smiles undo the susceptible young adventurer, which event later provides him with some uneasy moments when the possibility looms that she is his mother. The most sordid adventuress of the group is the elderly Lady Bellaston. Not only does she pay Tom to satisfy her erotic appetites but she viciously plans the downfall of the virtuous Sophia Western, whom she regards as a rival.

That leaves Bridget Allworthy and Nancy Miller. The former, who was noted for her discretion and prudence, actually is Tom's mother, having begotten him in an affair with her brother's protegee, Mr. Summer. Nancy Miller threatens to become a sentimental figure. Having been seduced, and then deserted by Tom's friend Nightingale, she falls from one fainting fit into another and in conscious moments tries to take her life, until Tom persuades Nightingale to make an "honest" woman of Nancy by marrying her.

much at stake; let her remember she walks on a precipice, and the bottomless pit is to receive her if she slips--nay, if she makes but one false step.²⁴

Fanny continues her story by reporting how she demanded that the officer marry her, and how through flattery he persuaded her to live with him as his mistress instead. Eventually he deserted her, and Fanny, in a great rage, went to his house and stabbed him. This explains her presence in the jail.

During Booth's recital of his misfortunes and his unjust imprisonment, Miss Matthews plays an interesting role. She declares herself fascinated by every detail of his courtship of the beautiful Amelia, and at proper intervals in the story interjects suitable comments, most of them flattering Booth, some expressing envy of the fortunate Amelia, others suggesting that Amelia might fall short of properly appreciating such a paragon as her husband. If it is not clear to Booth that Miss Matthews has designs upon him, it is clear to the reader by the time she exclaims in response to a part of the story, "Oh! heavens! how great! how generous! . . . Booth, thou art a noble fellow; and I scarce think there is a woman upon earth worthy so exalted a passion."²⁵

By the time Booth has finished telling his story, he feels very tender toward Miss Matthews, who has listened so sympathetically, with eyes such "eloquent orators" and look so

²⁴ Henry Fielding, Amelia (New York: Croscup & Sterling Company, 1902), I, p. 50.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 130.

"languishingly sweet as ever Cleopatra gave to Antony."²⁶ Nor does the example of Tom Jones, Fielding's more famous hero, give us any reason to expect that Booth will put up a struggle against temptation if the lady is willing. When time comes for the prisoners to be looked up for the night, Miss Matthews declares that she and Booth will sit up over a bowl of punch, which she orders. For a fee, the governor will permit this. The author supposes that the ensuing scene ought not to be presented to the public. However, he adds:

But, though we decline painting the scene, it is not our intention to conceal from the world the frailty of Mr. Booth, or of his fair partner, who certainly passed that evening in a manner inconsistent with the strict rules of virtue and chastity.

To say the truth, we are more concerned for the behavior of the gentleman than of the lady, not only for his sake, but for the sake of the best woman in the world, whom we should be sorry to consider as yoked to a man of no worth or honor.²⁷

For a week the two share Miss Matthew's jail room, she endeavoring to make him forget Amelia by reminding him of her superior beauty and passion. When notice comes that the man she stabbed is not dead and she may be released, Miss Matthews pays Booth's fine (with money sent her by another admirer) and plans that wherever she goes, Booth shall go too.

These plans are frustrated by Amelia's arrival and Booth's departure with her. From this time on Miss Matthews plays a minor

²⁶ Ibid., p. 172.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

role.²⁸ Occasionally Booth receives an imperious note from her, demanding that he come to her lodgings and threatening to inform Amelia of his infidelity if he refuse to come. Her vindictiveness gets no gratification, however, for Amelia forgives Booth even before he confesses the affair to her. (She knew about it from a letter sent by Miss Matthews, under an assumed name.)

In the end, Fanny Matthews becomes mistress of Colonel James. In that role, the author tells us, she grows fat and tyrannical. It is not the kind of ruin that novelists of a hundred years later would prescribe for promiscuous women, but in the case of Fanny Matthews it seems a convincing one.

From the first, her conduct in the prison marks her as a bold, passionate woman. She sends Booth the guinea, followed by a demand that he come to her room. Here she tells him frankly that she was in love with him eight or nine years ago and that he has improved in masculinity since. Her account of her seduction, marked by expressions of anger and resentment, reveals her as a bitter, but not repentant woman. Indeed, she herself says, "I am not one of those mean wretches who can sit down and lament their misfortunes. If I ever shed tears, they are the tears of

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George Saintsbury explains it this way: "Miss Matthews in her earlier scenes has touches of greatness which a thousand French novelists lavishing 'candour' and reckless of exaggeration have not equalled; and I believe that Fielding kept her at a distance during the later scenes of the story, because he could not trust himself not to make her more interesting than Amelia." Prefaces and Essays (London: Macmillan and Co., 1933), pp. 50-51.

indignation.' "29

Miss Matthews is a good actress. When it serves her, she responds to Booth's story with all the blandishments of a coquette, but once she has a man in her power, she reveals herself as a shrew. Although she offers her story as a warning to other women, it is evident that Miss Matthews is not sorry for what she has done, only angry, first with the officer, now with Booth who have dared to desert her. That she is incorrigible is clear from the fact that Amelia's precepts and example have no effect upon her and she is ready to make Booth's wife miserable. Her fine warning sentiments are simply a part of her act, of her scheme to entangle Booth. (That the sentiments are true, serves, of course, to further Fielding's didactic purpose in the novel.)

As much as any later novelist, Fielding condemns vice in Amelia, immorality included. In fact, the greater part of the story is a glowing tribute to his heroine's success in avoiding the snares spread for her. Dr. Harrison's criticisms of the failure of church and state to punish the "great sin of adultery" are Fielding's convictions, expressed through one of his admirable characters. Fanny Matthews, doted on by Colonel James, may escape poetic justice, but no reader ought complain that Fielding glamorizes or sentimentalizes her career, either during its

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Ibid., p. 50.

alliance with Booth or subsequently.³⁰

³⁰ By referring to herself on several occasions as Calista, Miss Matthews invites comparison with that person in a play by Nicholas Rowe, The Fair Penitent (1703). Rowe satisfied the eighteenth-century demands for poetic justice by having his Calista repent melodramatically and then commit suicide.

CHAPTER II

NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVELS BEFORE 1870

By the time Jane Austen published Pride and Prejudice in 1813, more than half a century separated that work from those of Richardson and Fielding. The moral climate and reading tastes were both undergoing changes that would be henceforth reflected in the English novels of that century. Marvin Mudrick, for one, claims to find in Pride and Prejudice evidence that Jane Austen had some difficulty in adjusting to the changing climate, though it is not evident in her portrayal of Lydia. For this he has only high praise:

One of Jane Austen's triumphs in Pride and Prejudice is her refusal to sentimentalize Lydia . . . once she has fashioned her to a hard and simple consistency. Lydia is a self-assured, highly sexed, wholly amoral and unintellectual girl. When she runs off with Wickham, nothing can lower her spirits or drive her to shame--not all the disapproval of society, nor the horror and shame of her family (though her mother, of course, is neither horrified nor ashamed). . . . She is not defiantly, but simply, impenitent: she recognizes no authority to which penitence or concealment is due.¹

But Mudrick suggests that when Jane Austen presents Elizabeth in judgment upon this sister, the sarcastic tone and lack of sympathy betray the author's uneasy awareness that convention demands a moral lesson. He summarizes:

¹ Marvin Mudrick, Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 100.

We get a conventional chase by an outraged father, a friendly uncle, and a now impeccable hero; we get outbursts of irrelevantly directed moral judgment, and a general simplification of the problems of motive and will down to the level of the Burneyan novel. Jane Austen herself, routed by the sexual question she has raised, is concealed behind a fogbank of bourgeois morality;²

That Jane Austen is out of sympathy with conventional treatment of such cases is, however, evident from the fact that she lets two characters whom she has treated most ironically be spokesmen for it. The first is Mary, who pontificates:

Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson; that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable--that one false step involves her in endless ruin--that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful,--and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behavior to the undeserving of the other sex.³

The other is Mr. Collins, who voices his astonishment that the erring couple have been so soon received by the Bennets. He advises, "You ought certainly to forgive them as a christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing."⁴

In Mansfield Park (1814), written ten years after Pride and Prejudice, Sir Thomas Bertram follows almost to the letter the advice of Mr. Collins. It is as if Jane Austen wishes to correct any wrong ideas readers may have received from Mr. Bennet's ironic acceptance of the conduct of his daughter.

² Ibid., pp. 119-120.

³ Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), p. 289.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 363-364.

Once more the fallen woman is of a good family. In fact, not only is Maria Bertram's father a baronet, but she is the elder Miss Bertram and so entitled to the prerogatives of that position. As such she is indulged by her vain, meddling aunt, Mrs. Norris, who succeeds in making her more of a snob than she might otherwise have been. Jane Austen does not delineate Maria as carefully as she does Lydia Bennet. Maria is best seen in contrast to her retiring cousin Fanny Price, who has no pretensions but who has a much greater awareness of what is fitting for one of Sir Thomas's daughters. When she is twenty-one, Maria is wooed by Mr. Rushworth, the dull heir to a large estate. The match is promoted by relatives, especially by Mrs. Norris, and since Maria

was beginning to think matrimony a duty; and as marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's, as well as ensure her the house in town, which was not a prime object, it became, by the same rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could.⁵

In this way Jane Austen reveals Maria's attitude toward her marriage, as well as something of Maria's nature. Her father's consent is not hard to obtain. From Antigua, where he is supervising plantation concerns, he writes that he is

happy in the prospect of an alliance so unquestionably advantageous, and of which he heard nothing but the perfectly good and agreeable. It was a connection exactly of the right sort; in the same county, and the same interest; and his most hearty concurrence was conveyed as soon as possible.⁶

⁵ Ibid., pp. 38-39.

⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

The only sour note is struck by Maria's brother Edmund, who does not think that happiness centers in a large income and who is convinced that Mr. Rushworth is a stupid person.

That Maria thinks so herself is clear from the fact that during the succeeding months she becomes infatuated with Henry Crawford, a guest at the parsonage, who pays attention to both Maria and her younger sister Julia. Maria, who determines to have Crawford, acts in a highly indiscreet manner. However, shortly after Sir Thomas's return from Antigua, Henry Crawford leaves the area without having informed Maria of his intentions. Her father, who is not favorably impressed with young Rushworth, reminds her that if she cannot be happy with him, she must break the engagement. She struggles only momentarily. Uppermost in her mind is the desire to show Henry Crawford he had not injured her. Her pride will be revenged when she becomes mistress of a large estate and a town house. Moreover, she is so eager to escape the restraints of her father's house that she will risk marriage with a man for whom she has only contempt rather than endure them any longer.

Six months after her marriage she elopes with Crawford, an action that has been foreshadowed from the beginning. Her father, unlike Mr. Bennet, deplures his own shortcomings in bringing up his family, the extremes of severity and indulgence to which his daughter was exposed, his own motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom.

He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their

inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice.⁷

This does not cause him to spare Maria, however. When she and Crawford subsequently part because he will not marry her (Rushworth has gotten a divorce), Sir Thomas refuses to receive Maria again at home. He hopes she is penitent, and he will support her, but he will not insult his neighborhood by bringing Maria into it again. She and her aunt, Mrs. Norris, go to another country to live in exile "remote and private, where, shut up together with little society, on one side no affection, on the other no judgment, it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment."⁸

The reader notices how acid the tone is here, and how obviously absent any sympathy for the misguided Maria, and how thorough the dispensation of rewards. Maria, of course, suggests Miss Austen, suffers more than does Henry Crawford, because that is the way of the world, but she foresees that he will have moments of self-reproach and wretchedness because he foolishly injured his friends and threw away his own chance of happiness with Fanny, whom he really loved and esteemed.

With Mansfield Park Jane Austen moved unequivocally into the kind of treatment that would be standard in English novels for many more decades. Lydia Bennet's elopement is a social faux

⁷ Ibid., p. 463.

⁸ Ibid., p. 465.

pas that brings disgrace to her family, most especially to her sisters Elizabeth and Jane, who are more sensitive than the others to the code of their society. Although the Bertrams also recognize the disgrace that Maria's elopement brings, those who may be expected to furnish Jane Austen's view of the matter, Sir Thomas, Edmund, and Fanny, all express or indicate their awareness that Maria's is a moral transgression. Sir Thomas knows himself to have "been governed by motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom," in approving the marriage; he recognizes now that theoretical religious instruction had not been enough; he hopes his daughter is penitent; but "he would not by a vain attempt to restore what never could be restored, be affording his sanction to vice," ⁹ Such a confession the worldly Mr. Bennet never could make.

Edmund's views are contained in his shocked report of Mary Crawford's attitude, which comes closer to that of the Bennets than anything else. Mary deplores the folly of the pair, their imprudence, but is sure that if Sir Thomas does not interfere and lets things take their course that in due time they will marry and recover a certain amount of social standing. Edmund regards the latter as "above all, recommending to us a compliance, a compromise, an acquiescence, in the continuance of the sin," ¹⁰ Fanny, to whom he addresses these opinions,

⁹ Ibid., pp. 461-465.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 458.

says little, but agrees wholeheartedly.

It is true, of course, that while both Lydia and Maria are guilty of immorality, Maria's adultery would at any time have been more severely censured than Lydia's fornication, when the latter ended in marriage. The fact remains that the distress caused by each affair is about the same. It is only in Maria's case, however, that the distress of the three characters who have been discussed stems from a belief that principle, not decorum first of all, has been violated.

Four years after Mansfield Park, Sir Walter Scott, who greatly admired Jane Austen's novels, wrote an entirely different kind of seduction story which likewise indicates the moral bias of its author and provides that the guilty pair shall live out their lives unhappily.

Behind the central incident in The Heart of Midlothian (1818), in which an unmarried girl is tried for the murder of her child, is a Scottish law--aimed at reducing the frequency of child-murder--which said that a woman might be freed of the charge if she had revealed her pregnant condition to at least one person.

In an introduction to the novel, Sir Walter Scott asserted that the incident was based upon fact. He had learned of a certain Helen Walker, who would not lie to save her sister's life, but who had walked barefoot from Scotland to London to ask the Duke of Argyle's intercession for the accused. In due time the sister, who was subsequently pardoned, married the man who wronged her and lived out her life happily. Helen Walker remained unmarried and died in lonely poverty about the year 1791.

Scott's fictitious counterparts are Jeanie and Effie Deans, half-sisters, the daughters of a thrifty Scots dairyman, David Deans. Theirs is a strict Covenant Presbyterian home where the Bible is diligently read and its resources applied to every daily situation of faith and practice. Deans's tendency toward fanaticism is tempered by the love he bears his motherless daughters, a love which is sometimes tried by the conduct of his younger child, the petted and spoiled Effie. In the rigid Calvinist household, the plain Jeanie is a dutiful, God-fearing daughter, but Effie is an exotic, both in appearance and conduct. In addition to masses of dark, curling hair, she has a "Grecian-shaped head," a "laughing Hebe countenance," and a "sylph-like form." While Jeanie works, Effie plays. Even at seventeen she does not share the duties but goes off to dance on the green, a recreation forbidden to her, and she returns singing the ballads her father does not want to hear. Like many a heroine of that balladry, Effie has a dashing lover, who meets her at the edge of the wood, unknown to her father.

She makes some effort to change her ways after both David and Jeanie reprimand her on one occasion. Referring to the dancing on the green, she says to herself, "'But I'll no gang back there again. I'm resolved I'll no gang back. I'll lay in a leaf of my Bible, and that's very near as if I had made an aith, that I winna gang back.'"¹¹ She keeps the promise for one week only.

¹¹ Sir Walter Scott, The Heart of Midlothian (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1961.), p. 115.

Then the lure of forbidden pleasure draws her again.

What David and Jeanie regard as a solution to their problem with Effie proves to be something far different. She goes to Edinburgh to work for a relative, with the warnings of her father and sister ringing in her ears, Deans's against imbibing strange religious teachings, Jeanie's against the dangers of loose living. Months later, when she returns to her father's house, she is a shadow of the beautiful girl who left it.

Jeanie soon knows what has happened, although Effie will not tell her the name of her betrayer or the fate of the child. When officers of justice, sent from Edinburgh with a warrant to arrest Effie for child-murder, appear, David Deans falls senseless from shock. His first words after recovering show his horror of her sin:

Where is the vile harlot that has disgraced the blood of an honest man?--Where is she, that has no place among us, but has come foul with her sins, like the Evil One, among the children of God?--Where is she, Jeanie?--Bring her before me, that I may kill her with a word and a look!¹²

However, love for the sinner exceeds David's hatred of the sin, and by the time Effie comes to trial, his hardness has melted sufficiently so that he too attends, hoping that Jeanie can swear that Effie confided in her. Jeanie cannot. (Her dilemma is feelingly presented, but it belongs to another aspect of the book.) She answers only, "'Alack! alack! she never breathed word to me about it.'"¹³ This seals Effie's doom. The jury finds her guilty,

¹² Ibid., p. 121.

¹³ Ibid., p. 252.

but entreats that the judge recommend her to the mercy of the Crown. Her sentence follows: she must hang. Effie hears it courageously and replies:

God forgive ye, my Lords, and dinna be angry wi' me for wishing it--we a' need forgiveness.--As for myself I canna blame ye, for ye act up to your lights: and if I hae venna killed my poor infant, ye may witness a' that hae seen it this day, that I hae been the means of killing my greyheaded father--I deserve the warst frae man, and frae God too--But God is mair mercifu' to us than we are to each other.¹⁴

The rebuke is intended in part for Jeanie, who would not tell the lie that would save Effie from the gallows.

Much of what follows relates Jeanie's experiences on the journey to and from London. They include her meetings with the old hag, Meg Murdockson, and her mad daughter Madge, who had been seduced by the same profligate who betrayed Effie. Madge is a fallen woman of another sort, wretched and degraded, the more pitiful because her criminal mother has assisted in her ruin.¹⁵

Jeanie is successful in getting a pardon, but before she can make the return trip, Effie elopes from her father's house, explaining in a letter to Jeanie that she could not bear her father's reproachful looks and words, even though she knew he meant well. During her brief farewell meeting with her sister,

¹⁴
Ibid., pp. 259-260.

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In Dombey and Son (1846-1848), Charles Dickens portrays a very similar roaming mother and daughter pair in Mrs. Brown and Alice Marwood. Both mothers plot vengeance on the betrayers. Both girls confront their betrayers again. Another device used by both writers is that of having a relative of the betrayer visit the death bed of the ruined girl.

Effie makes a statement that suggests she knows there is a price to pay. "'I maun drink as I hae brewed.--I am married, and I maun follow my husband for better for worse.'"¹⁶ Jeanie has no illusions, either. The man, she has learned, is George Staunton, portrayed by Scott as reckless and profligate and not one to impress Jeanie favorably.

Five years pass and Jeanie is herself a happy wife and mother before she receives another letter from Effie. This one informs her that Staunton has come into an estate, that she has been tutored, and that her husband presents her to society as the daughter of a Scotsman of rank. Although revealing a certain pride in her position, the letter touches on two reasons for her unhappiness: they have no children; and she must "drag on the life of a miserable imposter, indebted for the remarks of regard which I receive to a tissue of deceit and lies, which the slightest accident may unravel."¹⁷ Effie fears discovery especially because her husband has become jealous of family honor and himself dreads that her origin and past may become known.

In the melodramatic conclusion of the story which occurs about ten years later Sir George is killed in a skirmish with Highland banditti, probably by his own lost child, for whom he had been searching. On his dead body are discovered a crucifix and a hair shirt. Effie, Lady Staunton, shines ten more years in

¹⁶ Scott, p. 473.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 484.

the fashionable world, declining offers of good marriages. At last she goes to the Continent and there, although not taking the veil, lives and dies in the seclusion of a convent.

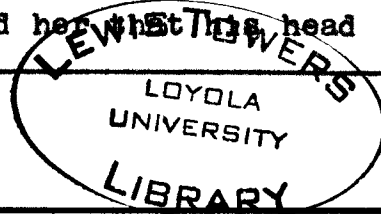
Scott concludes with a note that reinforces, probably unnecessarily, what the story should demonstrate. He writes:

Reader, this tale will not be told in vain, if it shall be found to illustrate the great truth, that guilt, though it may attain temporal splendour, can never confer real happiness; that the evil consequences of our crimes long survive their commission, and like the ghosts of the murdered, forever haunt the steps of the malefactor; and that the paths of virtue, though seldom those of worldly greatness, are always those of pleasantness and peace.¹⁸

The lesson is that in the lives of Effie and Staunton, evil brought its own reward. Jeanie prospered because she had been virtuous. To achieve the latter result, Scott took liberties with the original incident, for the real-life Jeanie, Helen Walker, had remained unmarried and lived a lonely, impoverished life. There was no evidence, either, that the other girl had been guilt-ridden afterwards. Scott has reversed the ending apparently in order to enforce the lesson.

That he was determined to show evil punished is clear also from the abrupt change in Effie's attitude toward her husband, as if Scott does not want this match to be a happy one. In the jail Effie told Jeanie that no woman ever loved a man as she loved Staunton. Immediately after her elopement she speaks resignedly of having to follow him for better or worse. Staunton, irritated by Jeanie's hesitation, had at one time told her that this head

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 540.



was not horned, nor his foot cloven, but Effie may have thought sometimes in her married life of the old ballad in which a frightened girl discovers that the lover who is carrying her away does have a cloven foot. She writes to Jeanie that if she brings disgrace on Staunton, "he will hate me--he will kill me. . . ."19 It is a statement, however, inconsistent with Scott's earlier presentation of Effie's passionate attachment to Staunton.

Because the two children born of their lawful union do not survive, Effie's and Staunton's thoughts turn again and again to the lost baby; Staunton is obsessed by the desire to find it and actually pursues the matter to his own death. Effie is and remains a lonely woman, wearing uneasily, if haughtily, the title thrust upon her. From her Scott withholds even the grace of growing through her suffering, of widened sympathies or increased understanding. W. D. Howells in his Heroines of Fiction, however, sees this as part of Scott's achievement. He writes:

At any rate, it seems to me an effect of great mastery . . . to let us see that Effie was always the same nature, in the shame of her unlawful motherhood, in the stress of her trial for the crime against her child's life which she was guiltless of, in the horror of the scaffold to which she was unjustly doomed, and in the rebound from the danger and disgrace when Jeanie's devotion had won her release from both. She was wrought upon by the passing facts, but not changed in her nature by them, as Jeanie was not changed in hers.²⁰

Arnold Kettle maintains that the treatment of Effie "is

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 484.

²⁰ W. D. Howells, Heroines of Fiction (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1901), I, 104.

allowed to show that the wages of sin are not wholly unpalatable."²¹ If this is true, it is not clear why Scott should make Effie's punishment so heavy and long-lasting. He might at least have shown husband and wife drawing closer to each other in their disappointment, but this does not happen.

That Scott does not intend to "show that the wages of sin are not wholly unpalatable" is seen by his reserving for Jeanie and her husband the kind of life that virtue brings. That is, the contrast between this life and Effie's points up Effie's suffering. Of them he says, "Meanwhile, happy in each other, in the prosperity of their family, and the love and honour of all who knew them, this simple pair lived beloved, and died lamented."²² Which concludes what is first of all Jeanie's story, in which Effie serves to emphasize Jeanie's sterling qualities. Effie illustrates in her life that the way of the transgressor is hard. Fornication had not been her only sin. She had disobeyed and shamed her father; she had turned away from the religion that sustained him and by which Jeanie lived. An exotic to the end, after living for years in the glittering world to which she had aspired, Effie tries to find peace in a convent.

The popularity of Scott's novel is described by Hesketh Pearson:

Never had so much admiration and delight been manifested over the appearance of a book in the memory of anyone then living

²¹ Kettle, I, 120.

²² Scott, p. 540.

in Scotland. It contained everything dear to the Scottish heart: religion, law, argument, innocence, guilt, revolution, domesticity; and above all it flattered the national vanity by portraying a Scottish heroine, a simple, homely, saintly Jeanie Deans.²³

To paraphrase Pearson one might add that the book contained almost everything that would be dear to the heart of the writer of a seduction story in succeeding decades. A number of the elements already present in Scott's story appear and reappear up to 1870. The wilful sister and the virtuous one who tries to save her are found in Rhoda Fleming (1865) and The Vicar of Bullhampton (1870). Both of these novels also portray the dishonored father.²⁴ (Adam Bede [1859] offers variations on these themes: the virtuous sister becomes Dinah Morris, another niece of the Poysers, although not related to Hetty Sorrel, and the dishonored father who finds forgiveness hard is Hetty's uncle.) In three of the novels, the girls are betrayed by men who inherit titles; Carry Brattle's lieutenant in The Vicar of Bullhampton may likewise have been of that class, but Trollope is not specific. It is interesting to notice, too, that each of the fathers refers in moments of great stress to his daughter as a "harlot." Also both Effie Deans and Hetty Sorrel appear in court on charges of murdering their babies; both get reprieves. Carry Brattle like-

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Hesketh Pearson, Sir Walter Scott: His Life and Personality (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 136.

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Subsequent to my observing these details, I have discovered that some of these similarities are pointed out by Charles J. Hill in "George Meredith's 'Plain Story,'" Nineteenth-Century Fiction, VII (September, 1952), pp. 90-102.

wise makes a court appearance, actually in defense of her brother, but she is goaded by the prosecution to confess her own lapse. Needless to say perhaps, all of the young women are condemned to unhappy lives. Hetty dies during her return from exile, but Effie, Dahlia, and Carry live on as unhappy examples to the rest of their sex. Effie may be the prototype, too, for the woman haunted by fear of exposure: Lady Dedlock (Bleak House), Mrs. Transome (Felix Holt), and even so late a figure as Meredith's Nataly Dreighton (One of Our Conquerors).

While the foregoing suggests that Scott's successors may have taken over a number of devices from his story, it is possible that they were also influenced by the precepts which he laid down (1824) in a Prefatory Memoir in which he protested Robert Bage's light-hearted views of sexual morality. Scott writes:

There is in his [Bage's] novels a dangerous tendency to slacken the reins of discipline upon a point, where, perhaps, of all others, society must be benefitted by their curbing restraint.

Fielding, Smollett, and other novelists, have, with very indifferent taste, brought forward their heroes as rakes and debauchees, and treated with great lightness those breaches of morals, which are too commonly considered as venial in the male sex; but Bage has extended, in some instances, that license to females, and seems at times even to sport with the ties of marriage, which is at once the institution of civil society most favourable to religion and good order, and that which, in its consequences, forms the most marked distinction between man and the lower animals.²⁵

After enumerating the functions of virtuous women in a stable society, Scott grants that a seduced woman may be restored

²⁵ Jonathan Swift, Robert Bage, and Richard Cumberland, The Novels of Swift, Bage, and Cumberland (London: Hurst, Robinson, and Company, 1824), p. xxix.

to society, under certain conditions:

But she must return thither as a humble penitent, and has no title to sue out her pardon as a matter of right, and assume a place as if she had never fallen from her proper sphere. Her disgrace must not be considered as a trivial stain, which may be communicated by a husband as an exceeding good jest to his friend and correspondent; there must be, not penitence and reformation alone, but humiliation and abasement, in the recollection of her errors.²⁶

Scott concludes with a minor objection, to Bage's coarseness, which he says "must find such shelter as it can, under the faulty example of the earlier novelists."²⁷

Whether they were consciously following Scott's dicta, or whether public attitudes were so crystallized that writers instinctively wrote according to this formula, cannot be established now. Whatever the case may be, for almost half a century these rules were the blueprint for the acceptable seduction story. The author who violated them was in trouble. Even with the best intentions in the world, certain novelists found themselves to have affronted squeamish readers. One of these was Charles Dickens. Like Thackeray, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, and George Meredith after him, he ran afoul of readers and critics.

In his second novel, Oliver Twist (1837-1839), Charles Dickens introduced Nancy, the first of a number of fallen women to appear in his works. Hardened in vice by the time she enters the story, this robber's "moll" relates only that she opened her

²⁶ Ibid., p. xxx.

²⁷ Ibid.

eyes on the London streets and knew no other life than that of its slums: hunger, cruelty, crime, and depravity. The exigencies of Dickens's plot require first that she recapture Oliver and then that she shield him from the villainies of Sikes and Fagin. When she is offered a chance of redemption by Rose Maylie and her grandfather, Nancy refuses, insisting that the chains of her old life are too strong. Later she holds out to Bill Sikes the same hope of a new life far away, where they will live apart and recall the old life only in their prayers. He refuses, and murders her instead.

Somewhat ineffectually and artificially Dickens attempts to show that remnants of decency linger in Nancy, evident when she shrinks in the presence of Rose Maylie, and when she yearns to be better. Since all good influences have been totally absent from her life, it is difficult to know where her good impulses come from, even if Dickens speaks of "woman's original nature left in her still."²⁸ If he had been seriously interested in winning our sympathies, he should have explained and demonstrated the sources of this decency. But then Dickens doesn't explain, either, the sources of Oliver's goodness.

In 1841, Dickens wrote in his Preface to the third edition of Oliver Twist a defense of his introduction of a prostitute into the story on the grounds that such ruthless exposure of evil might do more good than the glamorous representations, for

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Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (Bloomsbury: The Nonesuch Press, 1937), p. 304.

example, of The Beggar's Opera. More to the purpose here is this statement:

It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable, or improbable, right or wrong. It is true. Every man who has watched these melancholy shades of life knows it to be so. Suggested to my mind long ago--long before I dealt in fiction--by what I often saw and read of, in actual life around me, I have, for years, tracked it through many profligate and noisome ways, and found it still the same. From the first introduction of that poor wretch, to her laying her bloody head upon the robber's breast, there is not one word exaggerated or over-wrought. It is emphatically God's truth, for it is the truth He leaves in such depraved and miserable breasts; the hope yet lingering behind; the last fair drop of water at the bottom of the dried-up weed-choked well. . . . I am glad to have had it doubted, for in that circumstance I find a sufficient assurance that it needed to be told.²⁹

Interesting for its impatience with a distinction between literal and artistic truth, the statement also reveals the concern for propaganda that was to mark so many Victorian novelists.

During the serial publication of David Copperfield (1849-1850) Dickens again expressed his hope that treating the subject might do something to ameliorate the lot of fallen women. In a letter to W. F. De Cerjat, dated 29 December, 1849, Dickens wrote:

I had previously observed much of what you say about the poor girls. In all you suggest with so much feeling about their return to virtue being cruelly cut off, I concur with a sore heart. I have been turning it over in my mind for some time, and hope, in the history of Little Em'ly (who must fall--there is no hope for her), to put it before the thoughts of people in a new and pathetic way, and perhaps to do some good.³⁰

David Copperfield uses the motifs generally associated

²⁹ Ibid., p. xi.

³⁰ The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Walter Dexter (Bloomsbury: The Nonesuch Press, 1938), II, 194.

with fallen women in Victorian fiction: young, innocent girl; charming, but weak seducer; desertion; disgraced relatives; prodigal's return; penitence; exile and/or death. Generally, authors who depended upon such devices were not very successful in delineating character, and Dickens was no exception in David Copperfield.

The Steerforth-Little Em'ly affair abounds in pathos but offers little study of motivation or character. Indeed, it is representative of Dickens's falling prey to the appeal of pathos and consequently failing to deal sufficiently in developed characterization. Em'ly is a pretty, doll-like figure; Steerforth, a charming deceiver. What sexual charms Em'ly possessed, or what masculine attractions Steerforth exerted over her the reader never learns. He must depend on dark hints from the author as preparation for their elopement. Commenting on this weakness, W. D. Howells observes:

Neither is it credible that a girl like Emily, all humility, all sincerity, all unselfishness, shall become the prey of her pure love for her seducer. Without some alloy of vanity, of duplicity, of self-love in her it cannot happen, and never did happen since woman began to stoop to folly.³¹

Details of the elopement itself are, of course, not directly offered. Only much later, through Steerforth's rascally servant does the reader learn that Em'ly, somewhat in the manner of Effie Deans, lived abroad, learned foreign languages, and was admired everywhere.

³¹ Howells, I, 152.

Mr. Pegotty's heart-broken search for his niece is concluded with the help of a prostitute, Martha, one of several such figures in Dickens who, grateful for kindness shown them, perform some noble act. Together they are just in time to save Em'ly from prostitution.

The conclusion provides that Steerforth shall be drowned in shipwreck, as well as the faithful Ham, whom Em'ly was to have married. Mr. Peggotty, with Em'ly and Martha, now reformed, moves to Australia, where Em'ly lives out her days in penitence and good works.

To verify his presentation of Nancy in Oliver Twist Dickens appealed to the truth of everyday life. He does not follow the same criterion when he insists on death or exile for his fallen women. As David Cecil points out:

The situation of an innocent girl, seduced under a promise of marriage, is poignant indeed; but it is not necessarily a hopeless situation. The Em'lys of real life, as often as not, recover to continue life, as happy as other people. Dickens, partly no doubt in deference to the moral views of his readers, but also in order to ensure that he shall move us, enshrouds the story in an atmosphere of portentous tragedy, only justified by a plot like King Lear.²

The reader who feels himself cheated out of an elopement scene in David Copperfield may expect, for a while at least, that a later novel is about to make up for the lack.

For some time, in Dombey and Son (1846-1848), Dickens gives his audience reasons to believe that the second Mrs. Dombey

has dishonored her proud husband by eloping with his manager, James Carker. But, when the two are presented in Dijon, it becomes evident from Mrs. Dombey's words and conduct that, however unhappy her marriage to Dombey may be, there is nothing between her and Carker, and she intends that there shall be nothing.³³

However, one of the secondary characters is a fallen woman, without question, but she does not appear until Dickens is more than halfway through his story. Alice Marwood is first shown coming through the wind and rain as she passes the home of Harriet Carker on her way to London. Touched by the woman's wretched appearance, Harriet invites her to come in. Dickens tells his reader that Harriet "did not turn away with a delicate indignation--too many of her own compassionate and tender sex often do--but pitied her."³⁴ It is the voice of the humanitarian speaking. He adds that she is a "fallen sister." At Harriet's fire the woman dries her black hair and miserable clothing and eats the food offered her. Gradually Harriet's mild manner breaks down Alice Marwood's indifference, but when the former speaks to her of penitence, she says, "I am not! I can't be. I am no such thing. Why should I be penitent and all the world go

³³ Walter C. Phillips in Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919) writes, "Jeffrey is responsible for obscuration of the intrigue in Dombey and Son between Mrs. Dombey and Mr. Carker. Dickens intended that Edith should be the mistress; but the objection of the critic, heeded with no happy result, imposed upon the story a situation which is neither convincing, nor even intelligible." p. 94.

³⁴ Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (Bloomsbury: The Nonesuch Press, 1937), p. 483.

free. They talk to me of my penitence. Who's penitent for the wrongs that have been done to me!"³⁵

Her bitterness towards the man who betrayed her is illustrated when she comes back late that night to curse the astonished Harriet and to return her gift of money. She sneers:

It was well that I should be pitied and forgiven by you, or any one of your name, in the first hour of my return! It was well that you should act the kind good lady to me! I'll thank you when I die; I'll pray for you, and all your race, you may be sure!³⁶

Coincidence, beloved of Victorian writers and Scott, has served to bring Alice Marwood to the home of her betrayer's sister! Alice's story to that point is a familiar one in the annals of seductions. The illegitimate child of the woman who calls herself Mrs. Brown, she suffered poverty and neglect. Alice's description of herself to her mother is calculated to move Dickens's readers to sympathy. Of the child she was, she says:

Nobody taught her, nobody stepped forward to help her, nobody cared for her

The only care she knew was to be beaten, and stinted, and abused sometimes; and she might have done better without that. She lived in homes like this, and in the streets, with a crowd of little wretches like herself, and yet she brought good looks out of this childhood. So much the worse for her. She had better have been hunted and worried to death for ugliness.³⁷

It is Alice's accidental discovery that the young woman

³⁵ Ibid., p. 485.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 497.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 490.

who befriended her is sister to the man who betrayed her that sends her back to curse Harriet. Dickens concludes the incident with a paragraph intended to show how the conduct of one set of his characters is paralleled by that of another. Alice's mother sold her daughter into ruin. Edith Dombey's mother has done the same thing, in a more respectable, if not less ruinous way.

Dickens asks:

Were this miserable mother and this miserable daughter, only the reduction to their lowest grade, of certain social vices sometimes prevailing higher up? In this round world of many circles within circles, do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but our starting place?³⁸

To make very sure that the reader does not miss the similarity, Dickens provides that on a day when Edith Dombey and her mother leave their carriage to walk on the Downs, they shall meet Alice Marwood and her avaricious mother. Both the younger women carry a burden of bitterness towards their mothers as well as toward the men who "bought" them. In their own ways, both get revenge--and regret it. Their lives illustrate what such vices lead to; their stories "touch."

Kathleen Tillotson describes Alice Marwood as a "stagey" figure and adds, "Dickens did not shun the subject of seduction or unlawful passion, but he was on the whole content with the literary convention of his time: that such sin must be expiated in

penitence and death, or at least emigration."³⁹ Certainly Alice's death illustrates the wages of sin, but it is softened in approved fashion by her repentance under Harriet's tutelage.⁴⁰ Knowing the hearts of his readers, Dickens makes the most of their sensibility. Harriet reads to the dying Alice from the Bible,

the eternal book for all the weary and the heavy-laden; for all the wretched, fallen, and neglected of this earth--read the blessed history, in which the blind lame palsied beggar, the criminal, the woman stained with shame, the shunned of all our dainty clay, has each a portion, that no human pride, indifference, or sophistry, through all the ages that this world shall last, can take away, or by the thousandth atom of a grain reduce--read the ministry of Him who, through the round of human life, and all its hopes and griefs, from birth to death, from infancy to age, had sweet compassion for, and interest in its every scene and stage, its every suffering and sorrow.⁴¹

It is tear-jerking, obviously, but Dickens is again, in the words of Walter Allen, "using the novel quite deliberately as a vehicle for the criticism of society"⁴²

³⁹ Novels of the Eighteen Forties, p. 65.

⁴⁰ Alice's deathbed repentance is prepared for somewhat by her frantic effort to save Carker from Dombey's vengeance, after she has betrayed his whereabouts. Why she changes her attitude is not clear, however. One surmises that it is through Harriet's example of kindness. Dickens, of course, appreciates the sentimental value of having his prostitute do a good deed. Nancy and Martha are similarly employed.

⁴¹ Dombey and Son, p. 828.

⁴² Allen, p. 163.

When he has punished the two villains, one by humiliation and the other by death under a train, Dickens has fulfilled the demands of convention, but he has done also what was far more important to him--he has told a gripping story while pointing out the evils in society.

What must be one of the most petulant objections to the restrictions imposed on novelists appears in Thackeray's Vanity Fair. He has brought his adventuress, Becky Sharp, to that stage in her fortunes where, he says:

We must pass lightly over a part of Mrs. Rebecca Crawley's biography with that lightness and delicacy which the world demands--the moral world, that has, perhaps no particular objection to vice, but an insuperable repugnance to hearing vice called by its proper name. There are things we do and know perfectly well in Vanity Fair, though we never speak them; as the Ahrimanians worship the devil, but don't mention him: and a polite public will no more bear to read an authentic description of vice than a truly-refined English or American female will permit the word breeches to be pronounced in her chaste hearing.⁴³

In this novel, which was serialized at the same time (1847-1848)⁴⁴ that Dombey and Son was appearing in installments,

⁴³ William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero. Edited and with an introduction and notes by Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1963), p. 617.

⁴⁴ Kathleen Tillotson's statement (see p. 45 above) that novelists in the forties did not feel themselves handicapped by restrictions must mean to exempt Thackeray. Richard Stang has shown, however, in The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-1870 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 193-194, that Thackeray's attitude toward restrictions fluctuated. In an essay in The Times of September 2, 1840, he envied Fielding's freedom and castigated the squeamishness of his own day. In his lectures on the English humorists in 1853, he reversed his earlier praise and condemned Fielding's blunted moral sense.

Thackeray created one of the most non-typical of all fallen women to emerge in Victorian fiction. For her prototype it is necessary to go back to Moll Flanders and Roxana, who are like Becky in their preoccupation with getting ahead and have only their sex with which to barter. Becky, of course, was more careful of appearances, but Thackeray was not writing in Defoe's time--or in Fielding's--whose privileged frankness he claims to envy, although it is questionable whether, in Becky's case, it would have served him, since sensuality does not seem to be a part of her makeup. (At best, it might have cleared up the ambiguity of the Lord Steyne relationship.)

Ambition and greed motivate Becky's conduct, as it did Roxana's. Her early experiences with the world (Vanity Fair) have convinced Becky that she must exert all her powers to use people for her advantage, something she does without scruple from first to last. If this includes sexual relationships, she is hardly the one to flinch, totally amoral as she is. Her progress to the heights by way of an affair with Lord Steyne and her tumble from that eminence provide Thackeray with opportunity to expose, not only Becky, but more importantly, the world she is trying to conquer as well.

Thackeray's audience must have found little to affront it. He was making an adulterous woman an important figure in his story, but he never mentioned adultery, never presented her in a situation clearly immoral, never showed her as passionately in love. Further, Thackeray provided a virtuous counterpart in

Amelia, who could exemplify the ideal, if less interesting girl, wife, and mother.

It seems unlikely that Victorian readers were as troubled by Thackeray's ambivalent attitudes towards society and his characters as twentieth-century readers have been. The book was a success from the start. Evidently, readers were as fascinated by Becky's glittering wickedness as were the men she entrapped. And those who believed that vice should be punished in standard fashion could point to Becky's tawdry career after the Lord Steyne debacle, towards her life of continued pretense, and towards her now titled son's refusal to recognize her--surely frustration enough for anyone with Becky's aspirations.

Having portrayed a number of ruined women from the lower classes, Dickens turned his attention also to a representative from the nobility. Out of the welter of characters and incidents in Bleak House (1852-1853), Lady Dedlock emerges as a fallen woman. At first she seems an unlikely candidate. Dickens says she has "beauty, pride, ambition, insolent resolve, and sense enough to portion out a league of fine ladies." She is at the top of the social ladder where "an exhausted composure, a worn-out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction, are the trophies of her victory. She is perfectly well-bred. If she could be translated to Heaven to-morrow, she might be expected to ascend without any rap-

ture."⁴⁵

Unknown to her "honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable"⁴⁶ husband, Sir Leicester, Lady Dedlock, previous to her marriage, had had a child by an impecunious army officer. This child, which had been smuggled away from her at birth, and which she presumed dead, is now a girl of twenty and comes to visit in the neighborhood of the Dedlock estate. A series of events reveal her to Lady Dedlock and culminate in a highly dramatic recognition scene between mother and daughter.

While emphasis in the novel is first of all on the endless chancery proceedings which drive litigants insane, it is only little less the story of a proud woman who becomes the victim of a past from which she cannot escape. When the new-found daughter wishes to cherish her mother henceforth, Lady Dedlock replies that it is impossible since her secret must be kept from Sir Leicester, whom she respects too much to dishonor him. Loneliness will have to be her portion.

I must travel my dark road alone, and it will lead me where it will. From day to day, sometimes from hour to hour, I do not see the way before my guilty feet. This is the earthly punishment I have brought upon myself. I bear it, and I hide it.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Charles Dickens, Bleak House (Bloomsbury: The Nonesuch Press, 1938), p. 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 508.

Dickens exploits fully all the sensational possibilities of the situation: intrigue, revenge, disguise, detectives, murder, flight and pursuit. With speeches such as Lady Dedlock's farewell to her daughter, Bleak House would have offered an actress as great scope for histrionics as did East Lynne not many years later.

My child, my child! For the last time! These kisses for the last time! These arms upon my neck for the last time! We shall meet no more. To hope to do what I seek to do, I must be what I have been so long. Such is my reward and my doom. If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered; think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask! Think that the reality is in her suffering, in her useless remorse, in her murdering within her breast the only love and truth of which it is capable! And then forgive her, if you can; and cry to Heaven to forgive her, which it never can!⁴⁸

Unfortunately, while indulging his taste for melodrama, Dickens omitted the more important functions of analysis and insight. As a result, Lady Dedlock is nothing more than a personification of guilt and remorse.

The year 1853 saw also publication of another novel which shows both the writer's didactic purpose and the paralyzing effect that certain taboos might have upon an author.

Mrs. Gaskell's characterization of Ruth Hilton in the novel Ruth (1853) is marred by a flaw that has its source in the author's purpose as well as in Victorian convention. To incite pity for her subject while protesting the double standard of morality and to disarm readers who might object to a novel about

a fallen woman, Mrs. Gaskell stresses the innocence and purity of her heroine in such a manner as to make her lapse unbelievable on the author's terms.⁴⁹

In the following passage her subject is an orphan girl, not yet sixteen years old, who works in a dressmaking sweatshop owned by the callous Mrs. Mason. Ruth's beauty has attracted the attention of Mr. Bellingham, son of a patron, and he arranges to meet her walking one Sunday afternoon,

He suggested, that instead of going straight home through High-street, she should take the round by the Leasowes; at first she declined, but then, suddenly wondering and questioning herself why she refused a thing which was, as far as reason and knowledge (her knowledge) went, so innocent, and which was certainly so tempting and pleasant, she agreed to go the round; and when she was once in the meadows that skirted the town, she forgot all doubt and awkwardness--nay, almost forgot the presence of Mr. Bellingham--in her delight at the new tender beauty of an early spring day in February.⁵⁰

On this walk Bellingham, who manifests from time to time some of the traits of a typical villain, insinuates himself into Ruth's confidence by inquiring after her childhood and insisting that she confide in him as a brother. He proposes that the next Sunday they go to visit Ruth's old home. The author describes her feelings again:

⁴⁹ In an earlier novel (Mary Barton, 1848), Mrs. Gaskell had introduced the prostitute Esther. Heedless of the well-meant warnings of her brother-in-law, this pretty, but foolish orphan girl leaves her sister's home to become the mistress of an army officer, who deserts her after she has a child. When she reappears, long after, she is consumptive and addicted to gin--a not unrealistic punishment.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell, Ruth (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893) I, pp. 80-81.

How delightfully happy the plan made her through the coming week! She was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting the subject of a woman's life--if, indeed, wise parents ever directly speak of what, in its depth and power, cannot be put into words--which is a brooding spirit with no definite form or shape that men should know it, but which is there, and present before we have recognized and realized its existence. Ruth was innocent and snow-pure. She had heard of falling in love, but did not know the signs and symptoms thereof; nor, indeed, had she troubled her head about them.⁵¹

So innocent is Ruth, according to Mrs. Gaskell, that she does not associate her pleasure in the Sunday afternoon rambles at all with Mr. Bellingham's company! However, the reader is prepared for disaster because the author liberally strews hints that there is danger ahead: Ruth has an evil dream; Bellingham is described as calculating how "she might be induced to look upon him as a friend, if not something nearer and dearer still";⁵² the caretaker at her old home is reading some ominous Bible verses as they approach.

And so it turns out. On their return, Ruth and Bellingham are seen by Mrs. Mason who, mindful of the reputation of her shop, dismisses the girl at once, warning her never to set foot in her establishment again. In great distress the girl accepts Bellingham's solution that he send for his carriage and that she accompany him to London. While she waits alone at an inn, the thought occurs to her that she might ask the old caretaker at her

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 89.

⁵² Ibid., p. 67.

former home to let her stay with him. However, she has no money to pay for the tea she has drunk, and this makes her childishly afraid to leave the inn before Bellingham comes back. Then, the fumes from the landlord's pipe fill the room and give her a sick headache, which numbs her powers of thought. Consequently, when he comes back to carry out his plan, she is incapable of resisting firmly. (Mrs. Gaskell's problem anticipates Hardy's--with this difference--that her innocent Ruth had to resist what she had no knowledge of. Hardy's Tess, like Richardson's Clarissa, knew what the villain was after. In all three cases, the author finds a way to keep the girl innocent: headache, drug, and sleep serve the purpose.)

In 1853 an author was silent about what happened next, and Mrs. Gaskell was no exception. When she presents Ruth and Bellingham again, they are in Wales, and it is July. The servants at the hotel conjecture that Ruth is not his wife, but the author leaves her reader in doubt as she shows Ruth enjoying the scenery, trying to amuse Bellingham, who is bored by the rain, and meeting various people on her walks. On one such occasion she is shocked to hear a precocious child refer to her as a "naughty woman" and exclaim to his nurse that his mother has said so. It is the first indication Ruth has of how others regard her position. Up to this time the reader has looked in vain for her to betray some embarrassment, some feelings of guilt or shame. Mrs. Gaskell's emphasis on her innocence--or ignorance--is consistent, but the reader has difficulty believing that such

naiveté was common among girls, or that Ruth's five months in the shop would not have enlightened her. (George Eliot did not strain her reader's credulity to such an extent when she created Hetty Sorrel as neither innocent nor ignorant, but then she was not espousing the cause of fallen women, either.)

In an effort to show that Ruth is a "good novel," Annette B. Hopkins praises Mrs. Gaskell's characterization of Ruth. She says, "While the author is in profound sympathy with her Magdalen, she steers clear of hysterics and sentimentality. Ruth is no saint. Although she errs from ignorance, her weakness of will is also responsible."⁵³ But Mrs. Gaskell has already said she is "innocent and snow-pure," and she has moreover paralyzed any functions Ruth's mind was capable of by giving her a sick headache at the critical moment. Mrs. Gaskell's dilemma was this: she had created a character who was ignorant of the facts of life. How much resistance to such a proposal as that offered by Bellingham could she be expected to show? After the seduction, Mrs. Gaskell's treatment is steady again. She shows Ruth blithely enjoying herself in Wales until she learns that people are critical of her.

As Mrs. Gaskell herself recognized, Victorian readers demanded a tightrope performance of novelists. They wanted to read about life as they knew it, but insisted that certain aspects of that life were not fit subjects for literature. In a letter to

⁵³ Annette B. Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work (London: John Lehmann, 1952), p. 120.

her sister-in-law, Mrs. Gaskell anticipates criticism of her book--and also reveals that it was prohibited in the author's house:

"An unfit subject for fiction" is the thing to say about it; I knew all this before; but I determined notwithstanding to speak my mind out about it; only now I shrink with more pain than I can tell you from what people are saying though I could do every jot of it over again tomorrow. "Deep regret" is what my friends here (such as Miss Mitchell) feel and express. In short the only comparison I can find for myself is to St. Sebastian tied to a tree to be shot at with arrows Of course it is a prohibited book in this, as in many other households; not a book for young people, unless read with someone older but I have spoken out my mind in the best way I can, and I have no doubt that what was meant so earnestly must do some good, though perhaps not all the good, or not the very good I meant.⁵⁴

David Cecil suggests that as a product of Victorian society Mrs. Gaskell would in any event be unable to do justice to a story which

requires in its teller a capacity to express passion, an understanding of man's attitude to this, his most masculine activity, and an acquaintance with the animal side of character. Mrs. Gaskell cannot convey passion, did not understand men at all; while the society in which she had grown up had made it a primary purpose to see that a respectable woman like her should know as little of the animal side of life as possible. Ruth and her seducer are as much like a real seamstress and man-about-town as Gilbert's Mikado is like a real emperor of Japan.⁵⁵

Once Mrs. Gaskell has passed beyond the stage of Ruth's innocence, she moves more surely in depicting the girl, first in her acute misery, then in the painful journey through repentance

⁵⁴ Quoted by Annette B. Hopkins, Ibid., p. 124.

⁵⁵ Cecil, p. 236.

back to respectability.

While Bellingham and Ruth linger in Wales, he becomes so ill with brain-fever that the landlady summons his mother. That righteous woman banishes Ruth from the sickroom, and as soon as her son is sufficiently recovered, insists that he break off the relationship with Ruth. Although Bellingham has treated Ruth fondly up to this point, he gives in to his mother after only a slight struggle, partly because he is too weak to protest much and partly because he is once again under her influence. The note that Mrs. Bellingham directs to Ruth reflects the attitudes Mrs. Gaskell was trying to soften.

My son, on recovering from his illness, is, I thank God, happily conscious of the sinful way in which he has been living with you. By his earnest desire, and in order to avoid seeing you again, we are on the point of leaving this place; but before I go, I wish to exhort you to repentance, and to remind you that you will not have your own guilt alone upon your head, but that of any young man whom you may succeed in entrapping into vice. I shall pray that you may turn to an honest life, and I strongly recommend you, if indeed you are not 'dead in trespasses and sins,' to enter some penitentiary. In accordance with my son's wishes, I forward you in this envelope a bank-note of fifty pounds.⁵⁶

When Ruth learns from a servant that the Bellinghams have left the hotel, she tries desperately to follow their carriage. It is impossible, of course, and she drops by the roadside in despair. Here she is found by another visitor to the region, Mr. Benson, a Dissenting clergyman, who prevents her from carrying out a resolve to commit suicide and takes her to his own lodging.

There she becomes so ill that he calls a doctor and sends for his sister to be her nurse. After Faith Benson has talked with the doctor, she reports to her brother news that shocks them both--Ruth is going to have a child. What shocks Faith even more, however, is Ruth's exclamation when she hears the news: "Oh, my God, I thank thee! Oh! I will be so good!"⁵⁷

This is Mrs. Gaskell's third departure from conventional treatment of her subject. Her first is the effort to present Ruth as a pure girl. The second introduces a clergyman to help her at the critical moment; the third permits a girl to be glad that she is going to have a child. Faith Benson represents a conventional attitude toward such an event when she thinks that Ruth must be very much depraved indeed to utter such a thought. To her the child is a "badge of shame," but the Rev. Benson is Mrs. Gaskell's mouthpiece when he says perhaps it is God's will to lead the mother back to Him through the child.⁵⁸

So much has he become concerned with Ruth's lot that he decides they must take her back with them to their home. At Faith's insistence, he agrees to present Ruth as a widowed relative, willing to lie for the baby's sake although, as Mrs. Gaskell makes clear, "It was the decision--the pivot, on which the fate

⁵⁷

Ibid., p. 241.

⁵⁸

Gordon S. Haight in a review of Annette B. Hopkins's Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work asks, "I wonder if it (Ruth) would have been quite so bold without the success of The Scarlet Letter three years before?" Nineteenth-Century Fiction, VIII (June, 1953), p. 74.

of years moved; and he turned it the wrong way."⁵⁹ Her book is thus also a protest against the falsehoods that the prevalent morality makes necessary.

In the Benson home, the influences of genuine piety, the order and harmony remind Ruth of her childhood home and the mother who hallowed it. On Sunday, in the Dissenting chapel, she is so convinced of her sin that she slips to the floor, where she silently asks for God's mercy. By the time her child is born, she has come to see that, much as it will need a father's guidance, Bellingham's influence would be a worldly one upon the boy. At the child's baptism, which takes place only after Mr. Benson has carefully prepared Ruth for its significance, the thought of God's mercy allays her fears for the baby's future.

Because she feels herself a burden to the Bensons, Ruth inquires whether she ought to move away and try to support herself by sewing. They will not hear of it. However, a solution presents itself when wealthy, patronizing Mr. Bradshaw, a member of Mr. Benson's congregation, asks that she become a governess for his younger daughters. Much as she welcomes the opportunity, Ruth is uneasy about the role she must play. The Bradshaws certainly would not think of admitting her into their home if they knew her true story.

Years pass. One day she meets in the Bradshaw vacation home a man whom her employer is sponsoring for Parliament. It is

Bellingham, who now goes by the name of Donne. Seen first through the eyes of Mr. Bradshaw, Bellingham appears a self-assured man, accustomed to moving in higher circles. Jemima Bradshaw sees in him something she has noticed in race-horses, a sort of "repressed eagerness," as she calls it. It is clear that Mrs. Gaskell is making him as attractive as possible so that Ruth's meeting with him will awaken her old love and cause her a real struggle.

It is a great shock to Ruth to see Bellingham again. After a brief meeting on the shore, she hurries to her room in agony of spirit. To fight down the love which has been re-awakened she tries to recall that he deserted her, that she must think of his probable influence on her child. Again and again she prays for strength to do God's will. When he finally succeeds in speaking to her alone, she is convinced that he would be a bad influence on the boy. At last she even concludes that she no longer loves him. He has no conception of sin, no sorrow for the past. His exclamation that he is no saint, but that such as he have made good husbands in the past is the kind of argument Mrs. Gaskell wished her book to refute. Ruth has the author's answer when she says that he would contaminate their child. She refuses the opportunity to become an "honest woman," another one of Mrs. Gaskell's departures from conventional treatment.

Ruth's next crisis comes when the Bradshaws finally learn about her past. Towering in rage, Mr. Bradshaw accuses Ruth of depravity and the Bensons of deceit. The daughter, Jemima, repre-

sents the attitude of the Victorian woman.

She was stunned by the shock she had received. . . . Two hours ago--but a point of time on her mind's dial--she had never imagined that she should ever come in contact with anyone who had committed open sin; she had never shaped her conviction into words and sentences, but still it was there, that all the respectable, all the family and religious circumstances of her life, would hedge her in, and guard her from ever encountering the great shock of coming face to face with vice. Without being pharasaical in her estimation of herself, she had all a Pharisee's dread of publicans and sinners. . . . And now she saw among her own familiar associates one, almost her house-fellow, who had been stained with that evil most repugnant to her womanly modesty, that would fain have ignored its existence altogether. She loathed the thought of meeting Ruth again.⁶⁰

Mr. Benson, charged with introducing a depraved woman into the community, speaks out eloquently what is the central thesis of Mrs. Gaskell's book:

Now I wish God would give me power to speak out convincingly what I believe to be His truth, that not every woman who has fallen is depraved; that many--how many the Great Judgment Day will reveal to those who have shaken off the poor, sore, penitent hearts on earth--many, many crave and hunger after a chance for virtue--the help which no man gives to them--help--that gentle tender help which Jesus gave once to Mary Magdalen.⁶¹

When Bradshaw answers that the practical world has discovered the best way to deal with erring women, Mr. Benson declares that everyone who has sinned should have a chance to redeem himself. It is the author's conviction, but it is also a foreshadowing, for Mr. Bradshaw's son is going to need just such an opportunity in the future.

⁶⁰ Ibid., III, pp. 34-36.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 91.

The disclosure of her past requires that Ruth must start over again to gain the respect of her townsmen. When no other employment is open to her, she becomes a visiting nurse. Later she takes charge of a hospital when typhus breaks out. One evening her son Leonard, now a grown boy, hears a crowd extolling her loving service. He steps forward and announces that he is her son. From that day he walks erect in the streets, proof that no illegitimate need slink as a bastard.

Bold as she has been in some ways, Mrs. Gaskell spoils her book by a melodramatic conclusion in which Bellingham returns once more and now becomes the instrument of Ruth's death. The necessity of her going to nurse him through typhus is contrived, for his illness occurs after many have recovered and Ruth herself has been excused from the hospital because nurses who wish to earn money are again available, something the author evidently forgot when she presented Bellingham as lying alone because no one would tend him. Ruth's final argument, that Bellingham is Leonard's father and that she cannot help caring for him may be true, but his callous bearing after her death suggests that Mrs. Gaskell never quite knew whether to present him as a villain or as a man who had earned Ruth's affection early in their relationship when he treated her generously and in physical weakness consented only to part from her after assuring himself that his mother would do the "handsome thing" by Ruth. The proud, sensitive man who pleaded with her on the seashore to marry him, to let him take care of her and their child, who in a spontaneous gesture gave

Leonard his fine watch and chain, can hardly be a cool observer at the bier of that same woman when she has died to save him!

In Mrs. Gaskell's time, death or exile were the accepted fate of fallen women. In Ruth's case, she postpones death for many years but invokes it at the moment when Ruth's services to the community have made it recognize her true worth. Evidently her death is a sop to the readers and reviewers who, as Mrs. Gaskell might have phrased it in the words of the Bible, "went about as a roaring lion, seeking whom it might destroy."

It took a person like George Moore, who enjoyed being in the center of controversy, to carry the subject to its logical conclusion in Esther Waters (1894). But he was writing forty years later. A contemporary of Mrs. Gaskell's, George Eliot, demonstrated in Adam Bede (1859) that it was possible to work within certain limitations and yet to produce a fine novel.

Hetty Sorrel is a distractingly pretty girl of seventeen, living with her Aunt and Uncle Poyser when Arthur Donnithorne, heir to the old Squire, sees her at work in the dairy and completely turns her head by asking her to save two dances for him at his birthday feast. After that, Hetty dreams only of the fine things and the exalted position that would be hers if she could marry this rich young man, ideas she is careful to hide from her practical aunt and uncle, who hope to see their orphaned niece become the wife of an honorable carpenter, Adam Bede.

Arthur Donnithorne, no conventional seducer, is a likeable young man who looks forward to the day when he will be a

benevolent landlord and makes plans to improve the lands and houses of his tenants. If he is attracted to Hetty, he knows it is wrong to encourage her, and he resolves to go away. But his horse is lame, and while Arthur remains in the neighborhood, he continues to see Hetty when she walks in the Close. The affair comes to a climax when Adam Bede sees the two kissing each other under the trees. Adam's words are hurt and angry:

Why, then, instead of acting like th' upright, honourable man we've all believed you to be, you've been acting the part of a selfish, light-minded scoundrel. You know, as well as I do, what it's to lead to, when a gentleman like you kisses and makes love to a young woman like Hetty, and gives her presents as she's frightened for other folks to see. And I say it again, you're acting the part of a selfish, light-minded scoundrel, though it cuts me to th' heart to say so, and I'd rather ha' lost my right hand.⁶²

This is the crisis which causes Arthur to break off his relations with Hetty. At Adam's insistence, he writes her a letter saying that, although he loves her, he knows they can never marry because the difference in their stations is too great. He will always remember his Hetty, will help her if she should ever be in trouble, but they must no longer be lovers.

The letter shatters Hetty's dream-world. After the first shock, she decides she must leave the Poyser farm, and she asks her uncle for permission to become a lady's maid somewhere. The kind-hearted Poyser, who is fond of his pretty niece, sees her request as some kind of foolish fancy and refuses to hear of it,

⁶² George Eliot, Adam Bede (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1876-1877), pp. 251-252.

saying he has better plans for her. Not yet resigned to the loss of Arthur, but evidently convinced that he will not return to her, Hetty accepts a proposal of marriage from Adam Bede. By the time her wedding date is near, her vague earlier dread has become a reality, and she makes a secret trip to Windsor to find Arthur. Unsuccessful because his regiment has gone to Ireland, she is on her hopeless way back when she gives birth to a child in the home of a woman who befriends her. Resuming her journey soon thereafter, she abandons the baby in the woods for some hours. When she comes back, it is dead. There have been some witnesses to her travels, and when she is arrested, there is a murder charge against her.

Although her uncle and grandfather, especially, consider their name to have been disgraced by Hetty's conduct, she is not entirely without friends. The Rev. Irwine pleads for her; Adam Bede, shaken by the events, forces himself to attend the trial; Dinah Morris, Mrs. Poyser's niece, comes to visit the girl in jail. To her, Hetty, who has maintained a stubborn silence, confesses what has happened. Although she does not profess sorrow for her deeds, she does know the relief of being in Dinah's presence on the eve of the day set for her execution.

Just before that event, however, Arthur, who has just returned from Ireland for his grandfather's funeral, rides up madly, waving the release from death that he has obtained. Hetty's punishment becomes transportation instead, but it is really a delayed death sentence. Seven years later, on her return

from exile, she dies.

It is apparent from the summary, that George Eliot is using the standard elements of the seduction story: a pretty orphan girl, a wealthy lover from a higher class, a journey in despair, birth of a child, its death, trial for murder, and a death sentence.⁶³ A number of things, however, keep Adam Bede from being just another title in the long list of seduction fiction. In the first place, Eliot's characterization of Hetty and Arthur succeeds in convincing her readers that what happens is, in the words of Joan Bennett,

the seemingly inevitable outcome of their characters and circumstances. Both characters are developed with intelligent sympathy and thoroughness and everything is done to make the reader understand their predicament and the degree in which each is responsible for all that ensues. George Eliot portrays with insight and convincing truth Hetty's physical charms and her shallow, pleasure-loving, heartless nature, without ill-will but without any strength of purpose to withstand temptation. And she analyses Arthur's character, generous, impulsive, greedy for the approval of his fellows but prone to yield to his own immediate desires and to trust the future to take care of itself.⁶⁴

To present Hetty's tragedy convincingly to her readers,

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Most of these elements were present in the Heart of Midlothian (Above, p. 36), but were also the stock-in-trade of such scribblers as Mrs. Frances Trollope, whose Jessie Phillips (1844) employs the erring seamstress, the arrogant villain, thoughts of suicide, child murder, trial, repentance, and death for villain and victim alike. Mrs. Trollope's book also contains that other Victorian favorite, brain fever.

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Joan Bennett, George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 112.

Eliot makes effective use of contrast.⁶⁵ In early descriptions she emphasizes the girl's sensuous prettiness, her vanity, her irresponsibility, and her indifference to the people who love her, or for whom she ought to have some affection: her grandfather, her aunt and uncle, and their children. Hetty is irritated, as a person of her shallow nature would be, by Dinah's well-meant concern. She daydreams, without regard for realities, of becoming a fine lady through Arthur's love for her. The ordered life of Hall Farm, the prattle of the children, her relatives' practical concern for her future are all matters that Hetty does not appreciate.

The extensive introduction to Hetty before her fall is paralleled by the descriptions of her journey to and from Windsor and her experience in prison. The difference between past and present is made clear in such a passage as this:

She who had never got up in the morning without the certainty of seeing familiar faces, people on whom she had an acknowledged claim; whose farthest journey had been to Rosseter on the pillion with her uncle; whose thoughts had always been taking holiday in dreams of pleasure, because all the business of her life was managed for her; this kitten-like Hetty, who till a few months ago had never felt any other grief than that

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George Eliot was aware of the weakness of certain kinds of contrast. In a letter to Mrs. Peter Taylor, written on February 1, 1853, she says of Mrs. Gaskell's book: "Ruth, with all its merits, will not be an enduring or classical fiction--will it? Mrs. Gaskell seems to me to be constantly misled by a love of sharp contrasts--of 'dramatic' effects. She is not contented with the subdued colouring--the half tints of real life. Hence she agitates one for the moment, but she does not secure one's lasting sympathy." J. W. Cross (ed.), George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters and Journals (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1885), I, 304-305.

of envying Mary Burge a new ribbon, or being girded at by her aunt for neglecting Totty, must now make her toilsome way in loneliness, her peaceful home left behind forever, and nothing but a tremulous hope of distant refuge before her.⁶⁶

Her confession to Dinah, shortly before the day set for her execution, emphasizes her longing for the secure life she had despised. "'I longed so to go back again . . . I couldn't bear being so lonely, and coming to beg for want.'" It was the intense desire to go back that made her resolve to get rid of the child. "'I longed so for it, Dinah--I longed so to be safe at home.'"⁶⁷

Dinah remarks on the difference in Hetty when she says to Adam:

I must hasten back to her, for it is wonderful how she clings now, and was not willing to let me out of her sight. She used never to make any return to my affection before, but now tribulation has opened her heart.⁶⁸

The Hetty who repents under Dinah's tutelage asks forgiveness of Adam. She does not say she has forgiven Arthur, only that Dinah says she must, and she will try, "'for else God won't forgive me.'"⁶⁹ A flicker of the old Hetty appears for a moment in that word "try." It is another one of the means by which Eliot avoids the stereotype "more sinned against than sinning" fallen woman.

George Eliot's Hetty Sorrel is a convincing figure also because her creator took care to make various elements in her

⁶⁶ Eliot, p. 311.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 380-381.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 385.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 388.

story credible. The relationship between Hetty and Arthur is allowed to grow naturally, on home soil, as it were. She does not have to go to the city to be exposed to temptation: church, the dairy, the woods where Adam also walks provide the locale. Then, too, Arthur is not a stranger to Hetty or the neighborhood, but a young man born and raised in the community, looked up to by the tenantry as the person who will usher in a golden age. If other women were driven by economic necessity, Hetty obviously is not. Nor does her sexuality seem to be at fault. It is questionable whether she even cared deeply for Arthur, whether she loved him at all.⁷⁰ Common vices serve as motivation for her conduct--vanity and pride.

Eliot's treatment, compared to that of Dickens in David Copperfield, for example, is frank. Arthur's desire for the girl is clearly indicated in the vivid details of his ineffective struggle to stop seeing her. In fact, some of Eliot's details were criticized by readers. The kissing scene that shocked Adam also shocked a number of readers, as did her inclusion of a few details of Hetty's pregnancy.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Some fallen women, like Esther, in Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton (1848) professed even after they had been deserted, that they still loved the man who ruined them.

⁷¹ One reviewer of Adam Bede wrote: "There is also another feature in this part of the story on which we cannot refrain from making a passing remark. The author of Adam Bede has given in his [sic] adhesion to a very curious practice that is now becoming common among novelists, and it is a practice that we consider most objectionable. It is that of dating and discussing the several stages that precede the birth of a child. We seem to be

When it comes to the consequences of the sin, Eliot deals more conventionally with Hetty than with Arthur. At first glance, it might seem as if Hetty escapes rather easily after all. (The fact of her death is hidden in two brief sentences, often overlooked, in the Epilogue.) But Dickens's Alice Marwood, who had also been transported, was explicit about the horrors of a place "where there was twenty times less duty and more wickedness, and wrong, and infamy, than here."⁷² One shudders to think of Hetty, who knew nothing of that kind of evil, thrust into it. Her death, after enduring such an exile for seven years, seems entirely gratuitous.

Arthur's punishment, on the other hand, except for his return in ill health, is much more inevitable. His dreams of a benevolent squirearchy cannot be carried out because he has forfeited the esteem of the tenantry. More than that, he must bear throughout life the burden of knowing that he was largely responsible, not only for the tragedy of Hetty, but for the sufferings of many people.

threatened with a literature of pregnancy. We have had White Lies and Sylvan Holt's Daughter, and now we have Adam Bede. Hetty's feelings and changes are indicated with a punctual sequence that makes the account of her misfortunes read like the rough notes of a man-midwife's conversations with a bride. This is intolerable. Let us copy the old masters of the art, who, if they gave us a baby, gave it us all at once. A decent author and a decent public may surely take the premonitory symptoms for granted." "Adam Bede," The Saturday Review, February 26, 1859, p. 251.

⁷²

Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 491.

In another novel the author pursues even more relentlessly the subject of sin and its effects. This time her subject is a married woman from the upper classes.

Although George Eliot called the book Felix Holt (1866) after its Radical hero, the figure of Mrs. Transome is, as Joan Bennett says, "the most interesting achievement in the book."⁷³ And F. R. Leavis considers that in the characterization of Mrs. Transome, George Eliot "becomes one of the great creative artists."⁷⁴

Readers who learn that Mrs. Transome has been guilty of adultery need not expect another Hetty, or a titillating account of seduction and betrayal. Nor need they anticipate a plea for compassionate treatment of fallen women, or a study in remorse, such as Dickens had offered in *Lady Dedlock*. George Eliot, characteristically, explores an area left undeveloped by earlier writers--the logical consequences of such conduct in the life of a particular woman.

Mrs. Transome's affair with her husband's estate lawyer, Matthew Jermy, has taken place over thirty years before the story opens. Now in late middle age, she is a proud, power-loving, yet fearful woman, who has seen her one-time lover enrich himself at her expense. Long ago she lost all passion for the man, but she is careful to hide the bitterness she feels

⁷³ Bennett, p. 154.

⁷⁴ F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 55.

because she could not endure that the degradation she inwardly felt should ever become visible or audible in acts or words of her own--should ever be reflected in any word or look of his. For years there had been a deep silence about the past between them: on her side, because she remembered; on his, because he more and more forgot.⁷⁵

Married all this time to a man she despises, Mrs. Transome has lived for the day when her (and Jermyn's) son, who passes as a Transome, shall return from abroad where he has amassed a fortune, and reinstate his mother to rule over county society.

The arrival of Harold Transome does not usher in a golden age for his mother. Although willing to gratify her wishes to the extent of buying new furnishings and making improvements on the estate, he will not let her control his conduct or influence his views. When he announces his determination to stand as a Radical candidate for Parliament, she says, "'And you will put the crown to the mortifications of my life, Harold. I don't know who would be a mother if she could foresee what a slight thing she will be to her son when she is old.'" ⁷⁶ The words indicate that Mrs. Transome, chagrined at the failure of her schemes, blames others for her unhappiness. Her pride will not let her blame herself.

Worse yet, Harold clashes repeatedly with Jermyn over the way in which he has managed the estate. At last he tells his

⁷⁵George Eliot, Felix Holt (Harper & Brothers, 1877), p. 132.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 47.

mother that he intends to start legal proceedings against Jermyn to get back advantages that accrue to him from the property. Mrs. Transome's dismay at the announcement is vividly captured in her desperate reminder to Harold that in the past Jermyn was very helpful in winning certain lawsuits for the family. To her repeated pleadings he finally answers--and the irony must have been apparent to her, if not to him--

Why do you wish to shield such a fellow, mother? It has been chiefly through him that you have had to lead such a thrifty, miserable life--you, who used to make as brilliant a figure as a woman need wish.⁷⁷

One day Jermyn himself, in a desperate effort to avoid the lawsuit which would ruin him, blandly suggests that Mrs. Transome tell Harold it is his own father whom he is persecuting. Although she has long ceased to feel anything for the man, this request--which expects her to sacrifice a son's esteem to his security--disillusions her completely. If she had needed any more evidence of the unworthiness of the man, she has it now. George Eliot captures in her outraged reply the sum of what the past thirty years have taught Mrs. Transome--she, the proud woman, eager for power, had put herself into the power of a base coward. She had stooped. This is the fact that rankles her most of all. Words seem inadequate; she can only conclude, "That I should sin for a man like you!"⁷⁸

From that time on there is never any doubt in Mrs. Tran-

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 385.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 444.

some's mind that Jermyrn will expose her to save himself. One dreadful day Harold comes, asking her to deny what Jermyrn, in a moment of physical cowardice has told him. When she cannot answer, he turns from her, pitiless in his own misery, loathing the father she gave him.

F. R. Leavis makes the point that while George Eliot presents with "complete objectivity" the tragic irony of Mrs. Transome's situation, she is able to do so sympathetically, without "a trace of self-pity or self-indulgence."

Mrs. Transome is a study in Nemesis. And, although her case is conceived in an imagination that is profoundly moral, the presentment of it is a matter of psychological observation--psychological observation so utterly convincing in its significance that the price paid by Mrs. Transome for her sin in inevitable consequences doesn't need a moralist's insistence, and there is none; to speak of George Eliot here as a moralist would, one feels, be to misplace a stress. She is simply a great artist--a great novelist, with a great novelist's psychological insight and fineness of human valuation.⁷⁹

Perhaps, as Mathilde Parlett suggests, criticism of George Eliot's earlier novels led her away from such stories as she had told in Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss.⁸⁰ By placing Mrs. Transome's adultery outside the novel she could avoid criticism on that score. If it was done to placate those who would otherwise object on grounds of delicacy or decency, the author proves in this novel that the restrictions were not always a handicap.

⁷⁹ Leavis, pp. 55-56.

⁸⁰ Mathilde Parlett, "The Influence of Contemporary Criticism on George Eliot," Studies in Philology, XXX (January, 1933), pp. 103-132.

The preceding survey has shown that novelists began using the fallen woman as a character at a time when the age in which they wrote permitted a good deal of freedom in her treatment. Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding might assume that their readers would disapprove of harlotry, fornication, and adultery, but that they would not object to reading about these matters if they were treated with the proper moral bias. Their readers would probably have been impatient with later novelists who wrapped such subject matter, if not exactly in what David Cecil calls a "fog of hysterical prudish indignation,"⁸¹ yet in one that sometimes kept a reader pretty much in the dark about whether illicit sexual relations had taken place or not. Defoe and Fielding presented characters in the act itself; Richardson, while a bit more reticent in the case of Clarissa, certainly leaves no doubt about what happens.

By the time of Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott, other tactics have begun to prevail. Immoral conduct takes place off-stage, and the reader, who has been prepared somewhat by hints and foreshadowings, learns about it when other, more important characters, make the discovery--with Elizabeth Bennet, for example, or with Jeanie Deans or David Copperfield.

⁸¹ Cecil, p. 237.

Relegating these matters to an offstage location means that in many cases the author does not provide adequate motivation for the conduct. Generally poverty and deception are most often furnished as causes for a girl's fall; love, or desire, when it is advanced as a motive, cannot be very convincingly portrayed, as in the cases of Little Em'ly, Esther (Mary Barton), and Effie Deans. Better motivation is provided for Hetty Sorrel and Becky Sharp, whose creators recognized those powerful forces that may work in a woman's heart--vanity and ambition.

Coupled with the lack of motivation is the failure to depict struggle within the sinner. Surely Arthur Donnithorne, who struggled against his desires, must have had feminine counterparts, but they are missing in the novels of the period. There is little attempt to analyze states of mind or to probe the well-springs of conduct. Consequently, characters often become stereotypes of betrayed girls, heartless seducers, or hypocrites.

Since inner conflict is not presented, external conflict abounds. It may occur between a woman and her father or guardian, between the woman and her lover, between the woman and society, or between the woman and all of these at one time or other.

There is a tendency in these novels, as, for that matter, in those of Richardson and Fielding, to exaggerate both vice and virtue. Frequently the effect is gained by contrasting a fallen woman with a chaste one: Nancy with Rose Maylie, Effie with Jeanie, Becky with Amelia, Alice Marwood with Harriet Carker. It also occurs in pictures of callous, sneering villains--a type

found more often in the works of minor novelists like Mrs. Wood (East Lynne) and Mrs. Trollope (Jessie Phillips).

Related to the above is the tendency to dispense poetic justice--rewards to the good, punishment to the evil. The wages of sin are most often disease and death. Sometimes a life of penance may be permitted, in exile or in seclusion at home. If for a time a woman may seem to escape punishment, it is only that remorse and trouble may be the greater at last.

There are endless plot repetitions and similarities when emphasis must be focussed, not on the psychology of adultery, which is forbidden territory, but on the safe ground explored by Sir Walter Scott. Angry fathers vow that their daughters shall never darken their doors again; sisters try to arrange reconciliations; seducers reappear at critical times; prodigals creep home; secrets are found out at last.

Sometimes the restrictions obscure what an author was trying to say. For example, they cause Thackeray to present Becky's affair with Lord Steyne in such a way that Gordon N. Ray and John W. Dodds can draw contradictory conclusions, while they both maintain that restrictions did not handicap the novelist. Dodds writes, "There is not much question about Becky's guilt in the Steyne affair" ⁸² Ray offers, "Except for Rawdon's timely return, Lord Steyne would at last have received the favours for

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John W. Dodds, Thackeray: A Critical Portrait (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 135.

which he had paid so heavily."⁸³

Dickens, on the other hand, turned a restriction into what he thought would be an advantage. In a letter to John Forster he remarks that Jeffrey will not accept the installment of Dombey and Son which shows Edith as Carker's mistress. Quite willing to adapt the story to suit the editor, Dickens asks Forster, "What do you think of a kind of inverted Maid's Tragedy, and a tremendous scene of her undeceiving Carker, and giving him to know that she never meant that? . . ."⁸⁴ It is perhaps needless to say that Dickens's "tremendous scene" has been more often a source of irritation than of delight to his readers.

The fact remains, however, that major novelists of the period 1800-1870 rose above the restrictions, although these might be responsible for flaws in their books. Cramped in one area, they expanded in another. Their fertile imaginations peopled scores of novels with unforgettable characters; the sayings and doings of fictitious men, women, and children were the vital concern of middle-class Englishmen who looked forward to a year or more of serial installments of a good story and who did not shudder when a novel appeared in three volumes.

⁸³ Gordon N. Ray, Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity (1811-1846) (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1955), p. 502.

⁸⁴ Dickens, The Letters of Charles Dickens, II, 63.

CHAPTER III

THE FALLEN WOMAN AS VICTIM: 1870-1900

Novels in the preliminary survey are treated in chronological order, although comparisons and cross-references are made where relevant. Those in the third and fourth chapters are divided into two groups. One includes the "weak" women who succumb, in one way or another, to the hazards of their position or to weaknesses in their character. The other group includes the "strong" women who may be described in most cases as protagonists, either because they deliberately initiated the action that marked them or because they refused to accept the conventional estimation or end for themselves. (The difficulties of classification are demonstrated by the case of Mercy Merrick, who is both victim of her environment and the initiator of a plan to escape her misery.) Within these two main groups, novels with similar themes as far as the women are concerned, have been discussed together.

Other groupings, each having its own advantages, may suggest themselves. Novels might be discussed according to authors. Hardy, Gissing, and Moore, for example, used the subject on various occasions, and such an arrangement could show more clearly how an author might move from one kind of presentation to another. A grouping according to decades would recommend itself as being

able to show how treatment varied in each period.

The first novel to demand our attention in this section of the paper, as well as the four that follow it, is a conventional treatment of the fallen woman. All deal very delicately with the controversial subject matter; in four of them the author makes a plea for sympathy and help for the unfortunates.

In The Vicar of Bullhampton (1870), Anthony Trollope introduces a fallen woman to illustrate the character of his hero, the Rev. Frank Fenwick, an Anglican clergyman of great charity. The story relates the vicar's conduct during difficulties with a local marquis, his efforts to promote a friend's romance, and his concern for the miller's youngest children, Sam and Carry Brattle. The former he hopes to prevent from embarking on a criminal career; the latter must be rescued from a life of shame.

That Trollope anticipated criticism for introducing a fallen woman into his novel is evident from the Preface. He writes:

. . . I am tempted to prefix a few words to this novel on its completion . . . desirous of . . . defending myself against a charge which may possibly be made against me by the critics . . . I have introduced in The Vicar of Bullhampton the character of a girl whom I will call,--for want of a truer word that shall not in its truth be offensive,--a castaway. . . . I have endeavoured to endow her with qualities that may create sympathy, and I have brought her back at last from degradation at least to decency. I have not married her to a wealthy lover, and I have endeavoured to explain that though there was possible to her a way out of perdition, still things could not be with her as they would have been had she not fallen.¹

Trollope's defense further is that among young novel

¹ Anthony Trollope, The Vicar of Bullhampton (London: Bradbury, Evans, & Co., 1871), p. v.

readers there is no longer ignorance of sexual delinquency. Moreover, a discussion of these matters may have a wholesome, twofold effect, to deter girls from vice and to raise pity for the sufferings of the unfortunate.

In An Autobiography, however, Trollope affirms what might not be so clear to the reader who follows the experiences of Frank Fenwick. A passage, judged by Trollope's son to have been written in 1876, declares:

The Vicar of Bullhampton was written chiefly with the object of exciting not only pity but sympathy for a fallen woman, and of raising a feeling of forgiveness for such in the minds of women. I could not venture to make this female the heroine of my story. To have made her a heroine at all would have been directly opposed to my purpose. It was necessary therefore that she should be a second-rate personage in the tale;--but it was with reference to her life that the tale was written, and the hero and the heroine with their belongings are all subordinate.²

The result of Trollope's eagerness to provide a moral and his desire not to be misunderstood by prudish readers was a fallen woman who remains a shadowy person, whose motivation the reader does not understand and with whose fate he has somewhat less sympathy than the author intended. More important to a reader are Frank's quarrel with the marquis and the outcome of Squire Gilmore's love affair with Mary Lowther. In addition there is the suspense of a murder trial and of Carry's struggle to break down her father's resentment.

² Anthony Trollope, An Autobiography, With an Introduction by Bradford Allen Booth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947), p. 275.

About Carry's past, Trollope unfortunately relates very little. What is most clear is that she had been a pretty, high-spirited child of whom the vicar and his wife were very fond and whom they, like her father, probably petted too much. Carry enters the story when Frank Fenwick, acting on some information he has received, drives to a rural district where she is living in the cottage of a disreputable woman. The author's reticence makes it difficult to learn what has happened, but it is evident that Carry has been seduced by a lieutenant whom her father afterwards beat nearly to death.³ Since that event, Carry has not been seen in her birthplace, and when Fenwick finds her, he notices that the girl's beauty has been marred by dissipation. There is evidence that sin has hardened her, although she is regretful now and refuses his proffered hand with the exclamation, "Oh, Mr. Fenwick, I ain't fit for the likes of you to touch."⁴ Like many a prostitute or betrayed woman in fiction, she speaks of drowning herself.

The usual difficulties stand in the way of Carry's restoration. There is first of all her implacable father's decision not to admit her again to his house. There is also the attitude of the villagers, illustrated by the dissenting preacher who one day, in the hearing of Fenwick, refers to Carry as a

³ Trollope explains in An Autobiography: "I have not introduced her lover on the scene, nor have I presented her to the reader in the temporary enjoyment of any of those fallacious luxuries, the longing for which is sometimes more seductive to evil than love itself." (p. 275).

⁴ Trollope, The Vicar of Bullhampton, p. 147.

prostitute. Fenwick asks, "'Have we not all sinned so as to deserve eternal punishment?'"

Rev. Puddleham answers, "'Certainly, Mr. Fenwick.'"

"'Then there can't be much difference between her and us. She can't deserve more than eternal punishment. If she believes and repents, all her sins will be as white as snow.'"

"'Certainly, Mr. Fenwick.'"

"'Then speak of her as you would of any sister or brother, not as a thing that must be always vile because she has fallen once. Women will so speak,--and other men. One sees something of a reason for it. But you and I, as Christian ministers, should never allow ourselves to speak so thoughtlessly of sinners. Good morning, Mr. Puddleham!'"⁵

But if Fenwick could vanquish one of the clergy so neatly, he has less success with Carry's relatives. His intercession with her father embitters further the old man, especially after the vicar points out that the real cause of his anger is less the girl's sin than his disgrace.

Before Fenwick can do anything for Carry, he receives a note from her saying she has gone back to London. "'If it's any good to be sorry, nobody can be more sorry than me, and nobody more unhappy. I did try to pray when you was gone, but it only made me more ashamed. If there was only anywhere to go to, I'd go!'"⁶

⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

⁶ Ibid., p. 171.

Actually there are reformatories to which Carry may be sent, but Fenwick hesitates to propose that she enter one because he feels that young and attractive as she is, Carry still craves excitement and will probably rebel at the restraints an institution will impose. That Carry desires a life of excitement is not evident from her conduct or speech, however. She does say that she dreads to live with other outcasts, but she is also quite certain that her respectable relatives will not want her. Because of the restrictions Trollope imposed upon himself, he could not present the inner conflict that Fenwick suggests Carry may face. Consequently she appears as regretful, eager to be reunited with her family, and without any desire to resume an immoral life.

To provide conflict in the story, Trollope exploits a familiar theme. Fenwick appeals to Carry's married brother for aid in rehabilitating his sister. The man very much dislikes the idea of taking her into his home, so keenly is he aware of the disgrace she has brought upon the family. However, under Fenwick's pleading, he replies at last that he will agree if his wife consents. Mrs. Brattle does not. Fenwick asks himself, "What was the virtue of this fat, well-fed, selfish, ignorant woman before him, that she should turn up her nose at a sister who had been unfortunate?"⁷ Even Fenwick's reference to Mary Magdalene and the Saviour's mercy to such as she has no influence on

⁷ Ibid., p. 248.

Carry's sister-in-law. Mrs. Brattle will do nothing to rescue a girl from the fate she deserves for having become what she was. She knows nothing of such women, she says, has never spoken to one in her life, and will not begin now. Moreover, she thinks it indelicate of Mr. Fenwick to talk of such matters to her.

Next Fenwick intercedes for Carry with her married sister and brother-in-law. The latter thinks it would be just as well if women of Carry's type should die--after they repent, of course. No, he cannot have her in his respectable house.

One day Carry leaves her lodgings. It is not clear to her just where she is going, but that night she is discovered by her mother and sister at a window of their cottage. Tremblingly they take her in, fearful that the miller may come and prevent them. The next day Fanny pleads with their father to let her sister remain. When he consents, it is clear that he does not intend to forgive her; for a long time he will not even call her by name. Eventually her gentleness and sorrow work on the old man, so that he forgives her, but he can never face his neighbors and friends as before.

The vicar's daydreams for Carry's future also remain unrealized. True to his Preface, Trollope concludes, "As for Carry, she lived still with them, doomed by her beauty, as was her elder sister by the want of it, to expect no lover should come and ask her to establish with him a homestead of their own."⁸

⁸
Ibid., p. 451.

In addition to providing an acceptable, conventionally moral ending for his story, Trollope uses a number of the devices that had appeared in earlier treatments of the fallen woman. The faithful plain sister contrasted with the pretty fallen sister can be found more convincingly portrayed in The Heart of Midlothian, as can the stern parent for whom forgiveness comes hard. Variations of both motifs appear as well in Rhoda Fleming. The girl's return journey in despair is familiar, too, notably in such a version as that of George Eliot in Adam Bede.

By omitting the seduction and beginning with the vicar's search for Carry, Trollope avoids the familiar ground that other novelists had exploited and to which he would most probably not have brought any new insights. As it is, his treatment brings very little that is new to the treatment of fallen women in fiction. Instead, for example, of concentrating his study on the influences and motives that drive Carry back to her home, he concentrates on the weary journey itself, and simplifies the problems of such a move in terms of the hostility and difficulties she would face in making a comeback. The inner conflict she undergoes, which is suggested by Fenwick, is never made real, although her unhappiness is evident. As A. O. J. Cockshut concludes, "The main merit of the book lies in the effect on the other characters of Carry's illicit love, but he [Trollope] does also succeed in conveying the aimlessness of her life, and the emptiness of her

hours, after society has rejected her."⁹

These words also apply to another of Trollope's novels published in this decade, the deservedly little-known An Eye for an Eye. A. O. J. Cockshut declares that although the book was not published until 1879, it was written about 1870.¹⁰ If this is true, Trollope, in rather quick succession, twice gave his attention to the subject of a young woman betrayed by an army officer, for in 1868 he had prepared The Vicar of Bullhampton for serial publication in Once a Week.¹¹

One difference between the two books is soon apparent. In The Vicar of Bullhampton, Carry Brattle's seducer never appears. An Eye for an Eye is really the story of Kate O'Hara's betrayer, Lieutenant Fred Neville, heir to the Earl of Seroope. Stationed on the lonely Irish seacoast, he hunts seals and birds on the rocky cliffs and discovers a strange mother and daughter pair living in a cottage, remote from all others.

Mrs. O'Hara is a striking woman of strong character, determined to save her beautiful daughter from the kind of experience that has embittered her. Kate finds the cottage life intolerably dull. Neville's visits bring the romance and excitement she craves. Dreamy and romantic, she thinks of him constantly, and her life becomes increasingly bound up in his com-

⁹ A. O. J. Cookshut, Anthony Trollope: A Critical Study (London: Collins, 1955), p. 117.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 198.

¹¹ Trollope, An Autobiography, p. 270.

ing and going. Eager to stress Kate's innocence, Trollope unfortunately adds what is hard to believe, "but of the man as a lover she had never seemed to think."¹² Two other people view Neville's visits with great interest. The mother recognizes that he is the girl's chance of escape from her sombre life. If he means good to the girl, she will encourage him. A local priest sees Neville as a possible suitor for Kate and advises Mrs. O'Hara to encourage the handsome officer.

Nevertheless, Trollope's emphasis is on Neville's dilemma. Although determined at first to marry the girl, he is aware of obstacles to the match. Especially after he visits the Earl of Seroope and surveys the property that he will inherit, he is convinced that Kate would be an unsuitable wife for a man in his position. Then the return of Kate's disreputable father serves to warn Neville of the kind of family he is about to connect himself with. Through many pages Trollope traces Neville's indecision--will he or will he not marry the girl?

He offers little analysis of the young woman, but he tells us tearfully that Kate becomes the victim:

Alas, alas; there came a day in which the pricelessness of the girl he loved sank to nothing, vanished away, and was as a thing utterly lost, even in his eyes. The poor unfortunate one,--to whom beauty had been given, and grace, and softness,--and beyond all these and finer than these, innocence as unsullied as the whiteness of the plumage on the breast of a dove; but to whom, alas, had not been given a protector strong enough to protect her softness, or guardian wise enough to guard her innocence. To her he was godlike,

¹²

Anthony Trollope, An Eye for an Eye (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), I, 103.

noble, excellent, all but holy. He was the man whom Fortune, more than kind, had sent to her to be the joy of her existence, the fountain of her life, the strong staff for her weakness. Not to believe in him would be the foulest treason! To lose him would be to die. To deny him would be to deny God! She gave him all;--and her pricelessness in his eyes was gone forever.¹³

When Kate becomes pregnant, Trollope warns, "That terrible retribution was to come upon her which, when sin has been mutual, falls with so crushing a weight upon her who of the two sinners has ever been by far the less sinful."¹⁴ It was a conviction which he had expressed in the Preface to the Vicar of Bullhampton in 1870.¹⁵ In An Eye for an Eye, however, Neville's predicament earns him the reader's sympathy to such an extent that it is not always clear that he has been more sinful.

While her mother and the priest try to force Neville to marry Kate, she becomes more clinging, more pathetic. She writes gentle, pleading letters, begging him to come back. The last time he calls she babbles happily of going away with him after their marriage; her final words are, "And you will not desert me?"¹⁶

In the melodramatic ending of the story, Trollope provides that both sinners shall be punished. Neville is killed

¹³ Ibid., II, 13-14.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁵ Trollope had written, "It will be admitted probably by most men who have thought upon the subject that no fault among us is punished so heavily as that fault, often so light in itself but so terrible in its consequences to the less faulty of the two offenders, by which a woman falls." p. vi.

¹⁶ Trollope, loc. cit., p. 180.

when Kate's frenzied mother pushes him over the cliff; Kate goes abroad to live with her scoundrel father in a continuing exile. The child born to her does not live. Even Mrs. O'Hara does not escape punishment. Having become insane, she is shut up in an asylum.

As a fallen woman, Kate O'Hara does not differ much from most of her predecessors in nineteenth-century novels. Although she is often the subject of conversation or the object of someone's thought, she is not brought to life as an individual through her own thoughts or speech or conduct.

A similar victim appears in one of Thomas Hardy's early novels. Fanny Robin, in Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), is not an important character in her own right. She serves mainly to show up Sergeant Troy's deficiencies as a husband for Bathsheba, and as a wedge to drive husband and wife apart.

It is the old story of a pretty working girl seduced by a handsome soldier. Like many earlier nineteenth-century novelists, Hardy omits details of Fanny's acquaintance with her seducer.¹⁷ By the time the story opens, the harm has been done.

¹⁷ Leslie Stephen, who was editor of Cornhill, which serialized the novel, wrote to Hardy, "May I suggest that Troy's seduction of the young woman will require to be treated in a gingerly fashion when, as I suppose must be the case, he comes to be exposed to his wife? I mean that the thing must be stated, but that the words must be careful. Excuse this wretched shred of concession to popular stupidity; but I am a slave." (Frederic W. Maitland, The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen [London: Duckworth & Co., 1906] pp. 274-275.)

Although, of course, Fanny is eager to marry soon, Hardy does not explore the state of her mind or the quality of her feeling for the unworthy Troy. Hardy's dependance on conventional methods of portraying a fallen woman is especially noticeable in Chapter XL "On Casterbridge Highway," which is a moving description of Fanny's painful journey to the poorhouse. Even while the reader's attention is focused on her physical distress, there is no indication that she is far advanced in pregnancy. One is reminded of Hetty's return from Windsor in Adam Bede, although in fairness to George Eliot it should be noted that she does offer a clue to Hetty's condition.

Hardy makes Fanny Robin a shadowy figure. Only once, on the occasion of her tardy appearance at All Saints' Church, is she presented in the daylight, and even here it is in the shadows of the square. The first time she appears, Gabriel Oak sees her on the night she has left Bathsheba's service to follow Troy's regiment. It is too dark for him to distinguish much more than her outline. Again it is night, that February when she attracts Troy's attention by throwing snow at his barracks window. Months later, driving home from market, Bathsheba sees a figure in the gloom, but does not recognize her former maid. During the same dark night, Fanny makes her painful way to the poorhouse. Even in death she is benighted when Joseph Poorgrass, who is bringing her body to Weatherbury, stays so long at the tavern that it is quite dark before Gabriel Oak, who must complete the trip, can reach the church.

Here the parson announces that the funeral cannot take place until the next day. That night, by the glow of a candle, Bathsheba and Troy look on the face of the girl whom he has ruined.

While Fanny is in the main a vague, pathetic figure, she does reveal some distinctive traits. They can be seen when she writes confidently to Oak that Troy would not want her to be in debt to anyone, and when she assumes with childlike trust that her wedding may just as well take place the day after she has embarrassed Troy. The reader learns enough to wish to know more about her. However, in Far from the Madding Crowd it was not Hardy's intention to make an important character of a betrayed girl. That would come later.

Two novels by Wilkie Collins, The New Magdalen and Fallen Leaves, do give prominence to fallen women. In this case, they are girls who have been forced by poverty into prostitution. Heavily propagandist, these books are noteworthy as criticisms of prevailing attitudes towards such women. Although the first of these, *Mercy Merrick*, does distinguish herself for her efforts to rise above her situation, she is included with the victims because her story is that of a poor girl forced by circumstances into a life of shame.

When Mrs. Gaskell and Anthony Trollope take up the subject of the difficulties faced by a fallen woman who wishes to regain respectability, it is impossible to doubt that they are motivated by a sincere interest in the condition of such women. In the case of Wilkie Collins and The New Magdalen (1873), the

motivation is not always so clear.

Walter Allen disposes of the book as

a protest against the hostility of Victorian society to the woman known to have fallen. It is done with consummate skill, but with the wrong kind of skill, for the initial situation, that of a woman who has taken over another's identity so thoroughly that she can pass herself off as the other even among people who have known her, is so improbable as to remove the novel immediately from the category in which Collins would have us consider it.¹⁸

A resumé will show how Collins's use of suspended animation, false identity, mental derangement, coincidence, faintings, a mysterious black-robed figure that glides in and out of rooms, and endless dramatic confrontations takes the story out of the realm of the problem novel and into that of the sensational.

During an incident in the war between France and Germany (1870), an English nurse, Mercy Merrick, and an Englishwoman, Grace Roseberry, who is traveling to England to become reader and companion to a wealthy lady there, spend the night in a cottage which has become the temporary headquarters of the French commander. The traveler explains to Mercy that her father's death leaves her without family and dependant entirely upon his friend in England, to whom she carries letters of introduction. When she concludes by saying that hers is a sad

¹⁸

Allen, The English Novel, p. 207.

tale, Mercy returns that there are sadder stories.

Pressed by the other woman to explain herself, Mercy asks, "'Have you ever read of your unhappy fellow-creatures (the starving outcasts of the population) whom Want has driven into Sin?'" She continues, "'Have you heard--when those starving and sinning fellow-creatures happened to be women--of Refuges established to protect and reclaim them?'" Her next announcement startles Grace. "'I have been in a Refuge . . . I have been in a Prison. Do you still wish to be my friend?'"¹⁹

When Grace hesitates, Mercy makes one of the dramatic speeches with which the book abounds:

You don't offend me I am accustomed to stand in the pillory of my own past life. I sometimes ask myself if it was all my fault. I sometimes wonder if Society had no duties toward me when I was a child selling matches in the street--when I was a hard-working girl fainting at my needle for want of food. . . . It's too late to dwell on these things now Society can subscribe to reclaim me, but Society can't take me back. You see me here in a place of trust--patiently, humbly, doing all the good I can. It doesn't matter! Here, or elsewhere, what I am can never alter what I was. For three years past all that a sincerely penitent woman can do I have done. It doesn't matter! Once let my past story be known, and the shadow of it covers me; the kindest people shrink.²⁰

She is right. Grace is curious enough to ask Mercy how she obtained a position as nurse, but she has adopted an uneasy politeness. Mercy replies that the Matron at the Refuge, a kind woman, had helped her again and again to find work.

¹⁹Wilkie Collins, The New Magdalen (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873), pp. 18-19.

²⁰Ibid., p. 19.

Shortly after their talk, rifle-shots ring out, and shells explode about the house. One of them, bursting in the doorway, kills Grace Roseberry. In the events that follow, Mercy makes a sudden decision to assume the dead woman's identity. Through the intervention of an English war correspondent, Horace Holmroft, she obtains a pass that allows her to get through the lines, to England.

The next time she appears, she is living with the celebrated Lady Janet, as her companion, and she is engaged to that lady's friend, Horace Holmroft. One day there also appears Lady Janet's nephew, Julian Gray, a young clergyman whom Mercy remembers as the preacher whose sermons made such an impression on her at the Refuge.

One day the real Grace Roseberry also appears, to claim her rightful place with Lady Janet. Her story is that the German doctor who examined her after her supposed death discovered her to be in a state of "suspended animation," performed a delicate operation, and saved her life. Lady Janet and the two young men consider her to be deranged.

For some time, Mercy struggles with herself, convinced she is an impostor. At last she tells the story of her past. She had been the illegitimate child of a beautiful actress and a man of high rank who subsequently abandoned her mother. When she was ten, her mother died, leaving her one "fatal inheritance," her beauty. She begged for a living, and sold

matches until a kind couple took her into their home. She was forced to flee when the husband developed an illicit passion for her. Then she became a needle-woman, until her health gave way. One night she fainted in the street, was drugged by a man who appeared to be assisting her, and woke up in a house of prostitution. She drifted along in that life until one day, imprisoned for a theft she had not committed, she met the Matron of the prison, who introduced her to the Refuge. Because no employer will give her a "character," decent employment remains unavailable to Mercy. Here Collins's social protest is most evident.

At the end of the story, Holmcroft decides he cannot marry or forgive her. Julian Gray admits his love for her and asks her to marry him. In the meantime, the real Grace Roseberry has made herself so obnoxious that Lady Janet pays her to go away. That noble person, moreover, refuses to let Mercy's story make any difference in her love for the girl, and to show her regard, she gives a great ball in her honor when Mercy marries Julian. Society has its revenge, however, for having been defied, and not one unmarried girl attends the affair. Julian decides that he and Mercy must move to the New World to find freedom from prejudice and prudery.

Throughout the course of Collins's story it is difficult to keep Mercy Merrick steadily in view. This is not because she is offstage. Indeed, she is on it most of the time. But

her conduct is very much at variance sometimes with the original description that Collins provides: "Pale and sad, her expression and manner both eloquently suggestive of suppressed suffering and sorrow, there was an innate nobility in the carriage of this woman's head, an innate grandeur in the gaze of her large gray eyes" ²¹ Only a short time later, this person, who seems to have risen above her suffering, decides upon the wild and deceitful scheme of impersonating another woman.

In Lady Janet's home, she has no trouble impressing people favorably. Again the grand air is present, but the author tells us that she is always restrained by a secret feeling of remorse. When Holmroft asks her to set their wedding date, she is capable of bursting out fretfully.

After the appearance of the real Grace Roseberry, Mercy acts hysterically. With Horace she vacillates between blandishment and accusation. Only in Julian's presence does she return to the meek, submissive girl they have known. When Grace makes another one of her sudden entries, Mercy first confesses to what she has done, then turns sinister and threatening. She defies Grace to expose her, says she has a right to take advantage of the situation, even calls Grace mad! She enjoys a scornful triumph over her by accepting Horace's wedding

²¹
Ibid., pp. 12-13.

gift of heirloom pearls in her presence.

Perhaps to justify the conduct of Meroy, Collins makes of Grace an ill-tempered, vicious hag, insolent even to Lady Janet, demanding as her due what that noble lady generously gives. Holmroft comes off badly, too. After refusing to recognize his engagement to Meroy, he begins a correspondence with Grace, which is filled with petty criticism of the other characters, but which serves the author's purpose of informing his readers of subsequent events.

One of Collins's biographers, Kenneth Robinson, says of the book and its author:

He was more interested in the propaganda aspect of his story, in upbraiding society for its hypocrisy and inhumanity, and in preaching tolerance toward human frailty. Unfortunately, he insisted on weighing the scales so heavily in favor of the reformed prostitute as to destroy any illusion of impartiality, and his plea thus loses much of its effectiveness.²²

The story actually fails, even as propaganda, because of the author's love of sensation. The daring innovation of permitting the former prostitute to marry the man she loves is suspect for that reason.

Six years after The New Magdalen, Wilkie Collins took up again the theme of a prostitute's redemption, in Fallen Leaves (1879). This time her savior is a handsome, impetuous socialist named, appropriately, Claude Amelius Goldenheart,

²² Wilkie Collins: A Biography (London: The Bodley Head, 1951), p. 261.

fresh from the Primitive Christian Socialist Community at Tadmor, Illinois, where he has been brought up. On his return to England he makes the acquaintance of a strange couple, the wealthy Farnabys. It is not long before Mrs. Farnaby confides to him the sorrow of her life.

About seventeen years ago she had given birth to a child by her father's employee, who is now her husband. At the time, they were not married. Before the child was a week old, it was kidnapped, and she has never seen it since. She enlists the help of Amelius to find it and gives him a mark to identify the girl by, a deformity of the toes of the left foot.

If Collins fails in this novel to write convincingly, it is not for lack of some of the details heretofore omitted by Victorian writers. Mrs. Farnaby actually removes her shoes and stockings in Amelius's presence so as to show him a similar deformity in her foot. In subsequent developments, the hero acts unconventionally as well.

One night, after he has given a public lecture on Christian Socialism as practised in the Tadmor Community, he walks through one of the London slums. His thoughts are interrupted by a sweet, soft voice, and turning round, he sees a thin, trembling girl of perhaps fifteen or sixteen. (The reader surmises instantly, of course, that this must be Mrs. Farnaby's lost child, but Amelius will not learn it for a long time.) As he notices her pallor, she feels so that he must

save her from falling. Two other women of the same "sad sisterhood," as Collins euphemistically refers to it, help him to revive her and join in the search for a place where she may be safe from the brute who is responsible for the ugly bruise on her breast--which she innocently shows to Amelius.

When it is impossible to find a place for the girl, Amelius, who has a great compassion for the child so resigned to abuse and misery, decides recklessly to bring her to his own lodgings where he makes her take his bed while he sleeps on the sofa. In a childlike way she admires the furnishings of his room and asks whether he is going to let her sleep by herself.

The next morning the landlady ejects Amelius (Victorian fiction is full of affronted landladies), but not before he is able to get the girl some presentable clothing. In the meantime the grateful child, who says her name is Sally, has decided that she will be Amelius's servant and live with him always. A good friend advises him, however, to entrust her to a Home for Friendless Women, which Amelius agrees to do after he has met one of the directors. For a while Sally endures the life there and even appears to be making good progress. Then suddenly one night she arrives at the cottage where Amelius is now living, her feet blistered from the long walk. So great is her devotion to her benefactor that she must be near the person she adores. The following day, when Amelius inspects the blistered foot, he discovers the deformity which identifies her. A

reunion with Mrs. Farnaby takes place sensationally, on that woman's deathbed. She is a suicide.

Already improved by her stay in the Home, Sally continues to develop mentally and physically in Amelius's cottage. The author does not suggest that she is repentant or that she has been depraved by her early life. Amelius sees her from the first as being uncontaminated by it. The only evidence of anything like depravity that she is permitted to exhibit is a fear, amounting almost to jealousy, that her friend will marry one day, and this need not be traced to her early career. A number of crises, precipitated largely by the young man's friends, finally drive Sally to make the great sacrificial gesture of leaving him. He finds her again, in the slum where she first appeared, once more assisted by the kind prostitutes. After she recovers from shock to the brain and other vague disorders, the two are married. Amelius does not forget the women who have helped Sally and puts them in the way of beginning a new life in another land.

While Collins avoids some of the hackneyed motifs employed by other writers, he weaves into this very unconvincing story of a prostitute's rehabilitation a great amount of sensational material: scoundrels of various types, intrigue, theft, murder, delirium tremens, suicide, inquest, and a grand recognition scene involving deformed toes.

The whole adds up to what Collins's biographer calls

a "morass of novelettish mediocrity," and the "low-water mark of Wilkie's achievement."²³

Another novel which exploits the sensational elements in the story of a fallen woman, but has no reform purpose, is by Thomas Hardy. With Cytherea Aldclyffe in Desperate Remedies (1871), Hardy joined Dickens and George Eliot in the presentation of a character whose indiscretion, committed many years ago, returns to haunt her in the shape of a grown son or daughter. It is interesting to notice that in all three cases (Bleak House, Felix Holt, and Desperate Remedies) the stories are highly involved ones, turning on secret relationships and mysterious activities.

Like Dickens's Lady Dedlock and Eliot's Mrs. Transome, Miss Aldclyffe is an imperious woman in high position who has no desire that her past shall be known. Nevertheless, she is eager to have her son nearby and, after the death of her father, arranges that he shall be employed as a steward on the estate she has inherited. This act sets in motion a series of events which make the book rival thrillers like Mrs. Wood's East Lynne (1861), and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret (1862). William R. Rutland has shown how Desperate Remedies has many parallels with Collins's The Woman in White (1860).²⁴

²³ Ibid., p. 293.

²⁴ Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1938), pp. 141-146.

In this sensational detective story, Miss Aldclyffe has a minor role. In fact, she is shamelessly manipulated by Hardy to provide the initial secret from which all the other secrets and dark doings may sprout. At seventeen she had been betrayed by an army officer and had had an illegitimate child. At her parents' insistence, it was left on a doorstep, where it was found by a widow who raised the baby under her own name, Manston. Cytherea kept herself informed of the child's whereabouts, and when the opportunity offered, many years later, brought him to her neighborhood by a ruse.

Shortly before the time of Manston's arrival, Miss Aldclyffe engages as personal maid a young girl who also has the unusual name Cytherea. Questioning discloses her to be the daughter of a man whom Miss Aldclyffe met and loved--after her illicit romance with the officer, when marriage with a good man was impossible. At first she reveals an unhealthy fondness for the girl, which later finds expression in planning a marriage between Cytherea and Manston. Since Cytherea is already engaged, and Manston secretly married, there are obstacles in the way of such a union. After the son has murdered his wife and then committed suicide, Miss Aldclyffe gives up and dies of internal hemorrhage, but not before she has told her sad story to Cytherea. It was--and is--not enough to hang Desperate Remedies on.

Hardy did a great deal better in a novel which appeared

towards the end of the decade, where the tragedy does not evolve out of the woman's sin but out of her dissatisfaction with her environment.

Unlike all the fallen women before her, and duplicated by no one after her--such might be the description of Eustacia Vye, the smoldering beauty in Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native (1878). That she belongs in the category of fallen women at all must be ascertained from one or two hints that she drops about a relationship which existed prior to the opening of the story.²⁵ One time she says to Wildeve, in the measured cadences suitable to a prophetess, "You may come to Rainbarrow if you like, but you won't see me; and you may call, but I shall not listen; and you may tempt me, but I won't give myself to you any more."²⁶ And much later in the story she maintains, "As a wife, at least, I've been straight."²⁷ Only death by suicide prevents the third stage in Eustacia's relationships, her elopement with the husband of another woman.

If Hardy had presented a shadowy, conventional fallen woman in Far from the Madding Crowd, he had no intention of keeping this one in the background. One of the most quoted

²⁵ Albert J. Guerard has pointed out Hardy's "curious ability to suggest savage and even immoral feeling without recourse to much unconventional behavior." (Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944], p. 139.)

²⁶ Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1912), p. 72.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 405.

passages in the book makes clear at the outset that Eustacia is an important figure and lifts her quite out of poor Fanny Robin's class.

Eustacia Vye was the raw material of divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and the instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favours here, of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alternation of caresses and blows as we endure now.²⁸

Here, aside from the fact that Hardy is saying something about the nature of the universe as he sees it, he is more importantly saying something about Eustacia as he sees her. But his subject is a particular woman first, and a fallen woman only incidentally.

In another way, by comparisons direct and indirect to Mrs. Siddons, Marie Antoinette, Heloise, Cleopatra, Candaules's wife, Hera, Athena, Artemis, and Zenobia, Hardy attempts to place before his readers an enigmatic figure who will be his complex heroine. Hardy's accomplishment is summed up by Albert J. Guerard:

A great deal that is obviously successful in the portrait no longer need be discussed: the sense that it gives of a presence brooding dangerously over the fortunes of more docile persons in the valley below--a presence equipped with bonfire and telescope; the impression of unused

²⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

baffled energies and a recklessly masculine intellect; the conveyed despair and loneliness that will make any bargain to escape the heath; the desperate clawing for love as the only form of pleasure known; the pride, which refuses to explain away misleading appearances; the harsh honesty, finally of a direct appraisal of self.²⁹

Her story is quickly told. Forced to live on Egdon Heath, which she hates, Eustacia has amused herself by having an affair with the only man who approaches her requirements, Wildeve, an innkeeper. When his marriage to Thomasin is delayed, she hopes it is because he likes her better. As soon as she learns that Thomasin is not eager to marry Wildeve, Eustacia finds little satisfaction in his renewed attentions. The return of Clym Yeobright, a local boy who has made good in Paris, gives Eustacia a new interest, and she makes a successful effort to win him. Her triumph is hollow, for she soon learns that he is not going back to Paris. Then the failure of his eyesight causes her to chafe increasingly over the circumstances that frustrate her, and to Wildeve, now Thomasin's husband, she cries:

But do I desire unreasonably much in wanting what is called life--music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world? That was the shape of my youthful dream; but I did not get it. Yet I thought I saw the way to it in my Clym.³⁰

After a serious misunderstanding with Clym widens the gap between Eustacia and her husband, she is the more impressed

²⁹ Guerard, p. 138.

³⁰ Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 335.

by Wildeve's news that a small fortune which he has inherited will make it possible for him to travel abroad for a year. The result is that he agrees to aid her in escaping from the heath, on terms which are somewhat ambiguous to both of them. Any struggle that Eustacia experiences is not a conflict between right and wrong. She says:

He's not great enough for me to give myself to--he does not suffice for my desire! . . . If he had been a Saul or a Bonaparte--ah! But to break my marriage vow for him--it is too poor a luxury! . . . And I have no money to go alone! And if I could, what comfort to me?³¹

On the evening set for her flight, Wildeve is delayed and, arriving at the place of meeting, is just in time to hear the splash of a body falling into the weir. He surmises that it is Eustacia, grown despondent of his coming, and he plunges in after her. Shortly afterwards both are drawn from the water, lifeless. It is the end of Eustacia's history.

Looking back over her relationship with Wildeve, one notices that the early illicit affair has little significance in the story except as it demonstrates how she tried by that means somehow to escape Egdon. Hardy offers no motivation other than her desire for a great passion which should give meaning to her life. He is not interested in studying the effects of sin or its consequences, for in his understanding of the scheme of things there were no inevitable consequences. For that reason also, Eustacia did not need to be brought to a

³¹Ibid., p. 422.

recognition of the tawdriness of her dreams of love, or to a sense of the evils of pride and jealousy and selfishness, all of which she exhibits.

Although an illicit relationship had existed in the past and threatens to be resumed, Hardy's 1878 novel could hardly, on that score, have offended his most critical readers. Otis B. Wheeler has shown that Eustacia's comment which indicates her previous relationship to Wildeve is more clear in the revised version that Hardy prepared for publication in 1895 than in that of 1878. He concludes, "The successive versions of this novel point up again the great changes in public and private taste during the last decades of the last century."³²

What readers might have missed from the novel, however, would be the customary authorial condemnation of immoral conduct, or even the sentimentalization of the guilty woman. Perhaps they assumed that Eustacia's death was Hardy's way of assuring that vice should be punished. They might have seen in Thomasin's marriage, too, her reward for the regard she had shown for appearances and the triumph of injured virtue which had suffered even from the appearance of evil.

In another novel, The Woodlanders (1887), which is also the story of an unhappy marriage, Hardy does two interesting

³² "Four Versions of The Return of the Native," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XIV (June, 1959), 36-43.

things: he introduces for the first time into his works the question of marriage and divorce;³³ and he focusses attention, not on a faithless wife, but on the philandering husband.

The novel does offer two fallen women, subordinate characters, both of them involved in illicit relationships with Dr. Fitzpiers. On Midsummer Eve, Suke Damson, a lusty peasant girl, entices Fitzpiers into the hayfield at the conclusion of their annual revels. The affair has little significance for either one, except as far as the plot is concerned. On one occasion, Grace Melbury, who is going to marry the doctor, notices something compromising, and, although he explains it satisfactorily at the time, the incident later incriminates him. Suke's subsequent confession to her husband sets in motion the events which culminate, not in Fitzpiers's downfall, but in his reconciliation to Grace. Suke is never vindictive or repentant over the affair, simply sorry when it ends and determined, if the relationship cannot be continued, to move elsewhere. Hence, she persuades Tim, her husband, to emigrate. Hardy's treatment of the affair is realistic and convincing.

The other woman, Felice Charmond, is a much more complex person and is presented much more completely. Fitzpiers's affair with her begins after his marriage, when she has summoned him to attend her and confesses that she remembers him

³³Rutland, p. 214.

from a brief meeting years before. Now a wealthy widow, the former actress finds life in Hintock unbearably dull. Around her, nature's cycles offer a perpetual variety, but like Eustacia Vye in the much earlier Return of the Native (1878), she prefers the pageantry of society. Hardy's description of her ennui might almost be taken out of the earlier novel:

As soon as he (Fitzpiers) had left the room the mild friendliness she had preserved in her tone at parting, the playful sadness with which she had conversed with him, equally departed from her. She became as heavy as lead--just as she had been before he arrived. Her whole being seemed to dissolve in a sad powerlessness to do anything, and the sense of it made her lips tremulous and her closed eyes wet.³⁴

Like Eustacia, Felice courts intrigue to give meaning to life. Hers is a tragedy of misspent energy. That she was capable of devotion is demonstrated on the night when Fitzpiers suffers a serious head injury and Felice harbors and nurses him without calling any of the servants. But even he could not satisfy her permanently, it seems, for her death comes at the hands of another admirer, whom she alternately encouraged and rejected. Perhaps it was to be expected. Hardy had described her as "a woman of perversities, delighting in piquant contrasts. She likes mystery, in her life, in her love, in her history."³⁵

³⁴ Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders (London: Macmillan and Company, 1912), p. 238.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 234.

There is one occasion when she is alarmed about her status. It is after she has confessed to Grace, now Fitzpiers's wife, that she is at his mercy because she has permitted matters to go too far. His accident shortly thereafter, and their departure from the country together permit Hardy to avoid an exploration of this theme.

Two novels by George Gissing also develop the theme of the unhappy marriage. The first, Workers in the Dawn (1880), will be discussed in another category. The Nether World (1889) concerns itself in part with another dissatisfied woman, this one a representative from the lower classes.

Gissing takes extraordinary pains in The Nether World to trace the development of Clara Hewett, one of its minor characters, whose life impinges on those of his two frustrated visionaries, Jane Snowden and Sidney Kirkwood.

First of all there is Clara's childhood. Although the Hewetts are living in squalid surroundings when the story opens, Gissing indicates that they had known better times when, thanks to a legacy which had unexpectedly inflated their fortunes, John Hewett had sent his oldest daughter to a private school, had bought her a piano, and had provided other luxuries which had done their part to spoil Clara and make her dissatisfied when bad management brought the family once more into poverty. By sketching this background, Gissing prepares the reader to accept Clara's conduct later.

Gissing also reveals certain elements in Clara's make-up which make it possible for her to be discontented. She had inherited, perhaps from her father, the tendency toward revolt which, at least in earlier years, he had likewise known. She is intelligent, even crafty, ambitious, stubborn, and inclined to pout when frustrated in her designs. In the struggle with her father about her determination to work in the eating house, the author describes her as "merciless in egotism when put to the use of all her weapons, moved to warmest gratitude as some concession was made to her."³⁶ Clara Hewett was one of those who "had early learnt that the world was not her friend nor the world's law."³⁷

Sometimes it is hard to distinguish which of her qualities are a biological inheritance and which are the results of environment, as when the author says:

The disease inherent in her being, that deadly outcome of social tyranny which perverts the generous elements of youth into mere seeds of destruction, developed day by day, blighting her heart, corrupting her moral sense, even setting marks of evil upon the beauty of her countenance.³⁸

All this, plus descriptions of her attractiveness, sensuality, intellectual vigor, and her tendency to self-pity, mark Clara Hewett as a person whose character Gissing took great

³⁶ George Gissing, The Nether World (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1889), I, 67.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 208-209.

pains to delineate. It is a departure from the practice of Dickens, to whom Gissing was indebted in many other ways.

Shortly after the story opens, Clara disregards her father's urgent warnings and goes to work in a cheap eating house. Here his darkest prophecies come true when she meets a suave lawyer's clerk, Scawthorne, who promises to help her become an actress. When Gissing speaks later of the "dread fight with temptation," which preceded Clara's decision, he cannot be said to be referring to sexual temptation, for this he does not show. Clara is torn between self-reproach and self-justification in what she is planning to do. She is not concerned with the morality of the matter. In fact, she considers this a means also of avenging herself upon Sidney Kirkwood, the young man who has seemed fond of her, but who humiliated her by reproaching her harshness to her father.

In the manner of earlier novelists, Gissing drops the story of Clara Hewett at this point to focus attention on other characters for a while, leaving readers to imagine the worst. What price Clara paid for Scawthorne's assistance is suggested when, well into the second volume, Gissing re-introduces Clara.

The face was older, but not greatly changed from that of the girl who fought her dread fight with temptation, and lost it, in the lodging at Islington, who, then as now, brooded over the wild passions in her heart and defied the world that was her enemy. Still a beautiful face, its haughty characteristics strengthened, the lips a little more sensual, a little coarser; still the same

stamp of intellect upon the forehead, the same impatient scorn and misery in her eyes. She asked no one's pity, but not many women breathed at that moment who knew more of suffering.³⁹

At the time of her re-entry into the story, Clara is a member of a melodrama company, and has a chance to play the lead role. Her career comes to an abrupt end when the woman whom she is to replace, antagonized by Clara's scornful attitude, dashes acid into her face. At twenty, Clara is hopelessly disfigured. Someone notifies John Hewett, who nightly has been roaming London in a heartbroken search for his lost daughter, after the manner of Dickens's Mr. Peggotty. He goes to Lancashire to get her, thankful to have her once more under his roof, away from the shameful life he detested.

Back home, Clara shows no repentance or remorse. She hides in a dark room, but she has no feeling for renunciation or submission. In a short time, learning that Sidney Kirkwood is not married or engaged, she rouses herself to work on his sympathy, at first by asking him to help her find work, then by reminding him of their former relationship.

Hopelessly defeated in the one way of aspiration which promised a larger life, her being, rebellious against the martyrdom it had suffered, went forth eagerly toward the only happiness which was any longer attainable. Her beauty was a dead thing; never by that means could she command homage. But there is love, ay, and passionate love, which can be independent of mere charm of face.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., II, p. 197.

⁴⁰ Ibid., III, 101-102.

So reasons Clara, as she plots her strategy.

After their marriage, lethargy once more descends upon her. For her husband, life becomes a constant struggle, not only to support his wife, her father, and her brothers and sisters, but also to encourage Clara to take an interest in the affairs of their home. It is hard to be sympathetic to Clara's misery, but the reader who does not sympathize with Sidney Kirkwood when he gently begs for his wife's cooperation, must be hard-hearted, indeed.

Coming five years after The Unclassed (1884), The Nether World presents a fallen woman who is a striking contrast to Ida Starr, the prostitute who is redeemed by her love for a good man. The influences in the lives of the girls are similar, but one grows into a noble woman; the other becomes a selfish neurotic. With either one, however, Gissing declares his independence of time-hallowed models, although he is not free of one or two devices used repeatedly by other writers. He is also quite as reticent as Dickens in the discussion of sexual matters when he draws a curtain over Clara's affair with Soawthorne.

In other novels of the last two decades earlier themes continue to crop up. One of these, the fear of exposure, appears in two novels, one by Thomas Hardy, the other by George Meredith.

Of Lucetta Le Sueur, Thomas Hardy says in The Mayor of

Casterbridge (1886), "Her heart longed for some ark into which it could fly and be at rest. Rough or smooth she did not care so long as it was warm."⁴¹ However, her comparatively short life was to know very little of that rest. Childhood, with an army officer father, had not provided it. While she was still what Michael Henchard referred to as a "giddy girl,"⁴² she became intimate with him and had to endure the criticism of her neighbors in Jersey, from which marriage with Henchard seemed to offer the only escape. After her marriage to Donald Farfrae, Lucetta lived in anxiety lest he learn of her former indiscretions.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is, of course, not first of all Lucetta's story. She represents one of the relationships in the life of Hardy's main subject, Michael Henchard. Before Henchard's wife Susan appears in Casterbridge, he is ready to marry Lucetta, although he can not be sure that Susan is dead. Afterwards, from one of Lucetta's letters, it is clear that he was moved by the pressure she brought to bear upon him. She asks for the return of her letters "with which I pestered you day after day in the heat of my feelings. They were written whilst I thought your conduct to me cruel; but now I know more particulars of the position you were in I see how incon-

⁴¹ Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge (London: Macmillan and Company, 1912), p. 187.

⁴² Ibid., p. 91.

siderate my reproaches were."⁴³

After the death of his wife, Henchard receives a letter from Lucetta, announcing that she is moving to Casterbridge and now expects him to carry out his promise to marry her. She even gets Henchard's stepdaughter, Elizabeth-Jane, to live with her, an arrangement which will provide him with an excuse for calling there frequently. When Henchard does not call as soon as she wishes him to do (because she sent down word that she could not receive him the first time he came), she is ready to believe that it is because he has quarreled with Elizabeth-Jane. She sends the girl out for an entire morning, dispatches a note to Henchard, and confidently expects him. The man who calls first is Donald Farfrae, come to visit Elizabeth-Jane. He captures Lucetta's interest to such an extent that by the time Henchard comes, she sends another message that she will not see him, justifying herself by reasoning, "Henchard had neglected her all these days, after compromising her indescribably in the past. The least he could have done when he found himself free, and herself affluent, would have been to respond heartily and promptly to her invitation."⁴⁴

Lucetta could recognize the true facts, however. Telling the story of her own past to Elizabeth-Jane, but disguising the characters to make it appear someone else's story, Lucetta describes her fictitious counterpart as "so far

⁴³ Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

compromised with him that she felt she could never belong to another man, as a pure matter of conscience, even if she should wish to."⁴⁵

When Henchard comes again, she receives him coolly. To his request that she set a date for their wedding, she replies that it is early, and when he adopts a superior tone, asks him how he can speak so.

Knowing that my only crime was the indulging a foolish girl's passion for you with too little regard for correctness, and that I was what I call innocent all the time they called me guilty, you ought not to be so cutting! I suffered enough at that worrying time, when you wrote to tell me of your wife's return and my consequent dismissal, and if I am a little independent now, surely the privilege is due me!

And after he has gone, she storms, "I won't be a slave to the past--I'll love where I choose!"⁴⁶

On another occasion she forgets her passionate letters and justifies her present reticence by saying to him:

Had I found that you proposed to marry me for pure love I might have felt bound now. But I soon learnt that you had planned it out of mere charity--almost as an unpleasant duty--because I had nursed you, and compromised myself, and you thought you must repay me. After that I did not care for you so deeply as before.⁴⁷

To his inevitable question, "Why did you come here to find me then?" she answers, "I thought I ought to marry you for conscience' sake, since you were free, even though I-- did not like you so well."⁴⁸ When he asks why she does not

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 197.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 203-204.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 225.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

think so now, she has no answer. It is clear to both that the appearance of another man has made all the difference.

Afraid that Henchard will reveal her past, Lucetta marries Farfrae in a secret ceremony. On her return, alone, she tells Henchard that she has done so to secure the man she loves before he hears the story Henchard may be going to tell him.

Married to Donald Farfrae, Lucetta knows little peace of mind. Always her joy is mixed with fear of disclosure, a fear she shares with others of her kind, from Effie Deans through Lady Dedlock and Mrs. Transome. At one time she suggests to her husband that he give up business in Casterbridge and move elsewhere. He is somewhat interested in the idea, until the death of the mayor presents the possibility that Farfrae may succeed him. Another source of uneasiness is the fact that the letters she wrote to Henchard are still in his possession, although she has asked for them. He agrees to return them, warning her, however, that some day her husband is sure to hear about her past. She grants the possibility, yet hopes that it will not be "till I have proved myself a faithful and deserving wife to him, and then he may forgive me everything."⁴⁹

Lucetta knows one moment of triumph before the blow

⁴⁹
Ibid., p. 290.

falls. It is on the day when the Royal Personage visits Casterbridge and, conspicuous as the Mayor's wife, she proudly refuses to recognize Henchard in the crowd. The next night she recognizes, not only Henchard, but herself as well, in the figures of the "skimmington-ride," traditional presentation of adulterous persons. An inescapable confrontation with the facts she has attempted to gloss over, as well as the shock of having her secret exposed to the town, combine to give her a death blow.

Lucetta Le Sueur acted against her own convictions when she spurned Henchard. Whatever his weaknesses were, she believed herself morally bound to marry him, as her story to Elizabeth-Jane demonstrates. That she should rue her conduct when she met someone she liked better is psychologically realistic, as are her efforts to justify herself and her hopes that if Farfrae learns her secret, it will not be until he has been convinced of her real worth.

Hardy chose not to present the adultery in this story until it was a fait accompli. By so doing he avoided the difficulty of presenting the psychology of adultery; he postponed also the kind of criticism he would stir up later with his portrayals of Tess and Sue Bridehead. In Tess's story, also, Hardy would develop much more fully than here the theme of a woman's uncertainty about whether or not to relate her past to the man she marries.

The fear of exposure that haunts women like Dickens's Lady Dedlock and Eliot's Mrs. Transome is presented again, here very expertly, in Meredith's novel, One of Our Conquerors (1891). For twenty years Nataly Dreighton has passed, more or less successfully, as Mrs. Victor Radnor, wife of a wealthy magnate and patron of the arts, who has political aspirations. Increasingly, however, Radnor's ambitions for himself and his family bring them into contact with people who would be intolerant of the pair if they knew that Nataly was not his legal wife.

The story is known to a few intimate friends. When he was twenty-one, Victor Radnor married a sickly woman, much older than he. In her home he met Natalia Dreighton, her companion, a young and beautiful girl from a good Yorkshire family. Encouraged by Mrs. Radnor, the two young people, both of whom possessed fine voices, frequently sang duets together. At last Victor left his aging wife and established a new home with Nataly to preside over it. They have a daughter, Nesta, now twenty, whom they bring up ignorant of the irregular union of her parents. During the years they look forward to the death of Victor's ailing wife, which will free him to marry Nataly.

There is a great difference in the attitudes with which Victor and Nataly regard their past conduct and present status. He lives in a world of delusion in which he easily justifies

their liaison on the grounds that his marriage had been motivated by compassion for the widow, that his wife had thrown him in temptation's way, and that he had left her not one penny the worse off for her marriage to him. More than this, he argues, Nataly and he were made for each other.

The threat of exposure does not greatly alarm him. He muses:

She would come out of it glorified. She would be reconciled with her family. With her story of devotion to the man loving her, the world would know her for the heroine she was: a born lady, in appearance and manner an empress among women. It was a story to be pleaded in any court, before the sternest public. Mrs. Burman had thrown her in temptation's way. It was a story to touch the heart, as none other ever written. Not over all the earth was there a woman equalling his Nataly.⁵⁰

Nataly has no such naive illusions. She longs for reconciliation with her family, which Victor chooses to regard as the chief obstacle to her happiness. "If you knew what my poor girl suffers! She's a saint at the stake. Chiefly on behalf of her family,"⁵¹ he exclaims to a friend. But her greatest distress comes from fear of disclosure. She is yearning for a secluded rural cottage when Victor surprises her with a country estate, Lakelands, which he has been secretly building, and where he hopes to entertain local nobility, as well as their musical friends and old acquaintances.

⁵⁰ George Meredith, One of Our Conquerors (3 vols.; London: Chapman and Hall, Limited, 1891) I, 81.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 56.

Nataly loves Victor too much to oppose his plans; yet she cannot forget previous anxieties and snubs.

Now once more they were to run the same round of alarms, undergo the love of the place, with perpetual apprehensions of having to leave it: alarms, throbbing suspicions, like those of old travelers through the haunted forest, where whispers have meaning, and unseeing we are seen, and unaware awaited.⁵²

She must always feel uneasy because of her false position before the world and before her own daughter.

Nataly alternates between self-justification and self-blame. Hadn't she saved Victor from despair over his loveless marriage? She is sure that she would do it over again if it were necessary. She cannot regret her conduct; yet she adds, "I do not say I am blameless."⁵³ Unusually clear-sighted, she prays for the health of Mrs. Radnor, but recognizes the hypocrisy in the prayer. Although forced into the role of rebel against conventions, Nataly has very little taste for it.

She is a complex, believable woman. When Mrs. Radnor hears of Victor's Lakelands project and sends warning that she will not tolerate their living so publicly, Nataly grasps at the chance to escape another ordeal and asks Victor if his wife may not be right. His answer that they must defy her alarms Nataly still further. When it becomes necessary to tell the Hon. Dudley Sowerby, who has proposed marriage to Nesta, of the taint upon her child, Nataly recognizes that the relief

⁵² Ibid., p. 95.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 210.

of doing the right thing at last is conditioned also by the fact that Dartrey Fenellon is now a widower. She has long looked upon him as the ideal partner for her daughter, someone who knows the true situation and permits it to make no difference in his regard for Victor and Nataly.

The crisis over their moving to Lakelands discloses to Nataly certain of Victor's qualities to which she has been blind. At last, with the danger of exposure now markedly greater than it had been, she realizes that he has mastered her, that although she had not thought of him as infallible, she had yet allowed her love to blind her to his weaknesses. Because he was eager that Nesta should make a noble marriage, he had withheld from her the information that Dartrey's wife had been dead for some months. "Sensible of capacity, she confessed to the having been morally subdued, physically as well; swept onward, and she was arrested now by an accident, like a waif of the river-floods by the dip of a branch."⁵⁴ To Dartrey Fenellon she describes what is happening:

Oh!--poor soul!--how he is perverted since that building of Lakelands! He cannot take soundings of all the things he does. Formerly he confided in me, in all things: now not one;--I am the chief person to deceive. If only he had waited! We are in a network of intrigues and schemes, every artifice, in London--tempting one to hate simple worthy people, who naturally have their views and see me an impostor, and tolerate me, fascinated by him;--or bribed--it has to be said. There are ways of bribing. I trust he may not have in the end to pay too heavily for succeeding. He seems a man pushed by Destiny; not

⁵⁴ Ibid., II, 254.

irresponsible, but less responsible than most. He is desperately tempted by his never failing. . . . Latterly I have seen into him: I never did before. Had I been stronger, I might have saved or averted⁵⁵

When Nesta learns from another suitor that there is a "shadow" upon her and subsequently hears the truth about her parents, some of Nataly's worst fears seem to be over, for Nesta shows no lack of understanding, her love for them remaining as great as ever. Nataly's relief is short-lived, however. Dudley Sowerby, who withdrew only temporarily from the field, has established himself with Victor as the man whom Nesta will marry. With this as sufficient reason for his concern, Dudley appears before Nataly with the news that in Brighton Nesta has been seen in the company of a certain Mrs. Marsett, the mistress of an army captain. Dudley expects that her parents will warn Nesta of the indiscretion. High-minded as he believes Nesta to be, he cannot tolerate such conduct in the woman he marries.

The news shocks Nataly. In her long effort to regain respectability, this comes almost as a deathblow. To Victor she reports hysterically:

She has been permitted to make acquaintance--she has been seen riding with--she has called upon--Oh! it is one of those abandoned women. In her house! Our girl! Our Nesta! . . . And grant me this--that never was girl more carefully . . . never till she was taken from me.⁵⁶

She can imagine people saying that Nesta's conduct is to be

⁵⁵ Ibid., III, 30-31.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

expected from a girl with such a mother.

Now Nataly determines that Nesta, who refuses to see any impropriety in her efforts to help Mrs. Marsett, shall marry, not Dartrey Fenellon, whose ideas are liberal, and who criticizes Dudley for complaining about Nesta's good work, but Dudley Sowerby. Only marriage to one so exalted can wipe out the smirch that attaches to Nesta and the blame that must fall on her mother. Nataly herself had been an unwilling rebel; her daughter shows too much wilfulness and will need a proper husband to control her.

For a second time Nataly's hopes are frustrated, however. Her own marriage to Victor has been delayed twenty years. Her daughter's redemption through marriage will not take place because Nesta refuses Dudley. Even Dartrey disappoints her because he defends Nesta's conduct and makes the point that the world regards these matters more tolerantly now. Embittered, Nataly cannot see that the understanding she hoped for from her daughter may by that daughter be extended also to another fallen woman. It is almost as if Nataly regards herself as injured because Mrs. Marsett, who marries the captain, has gained the status Nataly still lacks.

While she is in this tormented state, Victor receives a notice from his wife that she wishes to see him. Nataly insists on accompanying him. The brief visit with the dying woman is too great a strain on Nataly. That night, while

Victor is campaigning for election to Parliament, she has a fatal heart attack.

It would be a tempting over-simplification to hold Victor Radnor responsible for the tragedy of Natalia Dreighton. His pride in her and his ambitions cause him to thrust his wife and himself into the public eye as he seeks the support of prominent people. Able to justify his conduct to himself, he is insensitive to the suffering she undergoes. Nor would it be correct to blame society for her misery. Actually, Nataly does not have to endure much censure. She has understanding friends; there are enough others who will overlook the past to be in the Radnor circle. Even Dudley Sowerby can forgive it.

The real difficulty lies with Nataly herself. Brought up to respect the proprieties, she remains a woman of conventional outlook, even while living for twenty years as Radnor's common-law wife. She never accepts her ambiguous position; in fact, she resents it increasingly. Eventually she becomes disillusioned with the man for love of whom she defied society, partly because he refuses to be intimidated by it, partly because he reveals some character weaknesses. Disappointed also in her daughter's refusal to be bound by conventions, she displays a surprisingly harsh attitude toward another woman in a position similar to her own.

In One of Our Conquerors Meredith abandoned clichés in

treating the subject of a fallen woman. Although living in sin, Nataly is nonetheless admired by her friends and cherished by her husband and daughter. She is talented and shines at the musical evenings her husband arranges; she moves as a queen among her guests. Victor is no monster of cruelty or lust; Nataly is not a pathetic figure, nor an insolent one. She is proud, conventional, even hard. And she is believably disillusioned. In this novel, Meredith's penetrating study of a successful man who overreaches himself is accompanied by an equally admirable study of the woman who wanted more than anything else to be known as his legal wife.

A much less convincing victim appears in an inferior novel which presents a similar situation. In Denzil Quarrier (1892), George Gissing offers the dilemma of a wealthy man with political ambitions who has been living secretly with Lillian, an attractive young woman who cannot be his wife because she was married, at seventeen, to a man now serving a jail sentence for forgery.

There are strong resemblances between Denzil Quarrier and Meredith's One of Our Conquerors, which had appeared the previous year. Denzil is another candidate for Parliament; Lillian, like Nataly, must exert herself for her lover's sake; their secret is in the keeping of the legal partner; the man regards their conduct as blameless; the woman has secret compunctions; both women are sacrificed for their lovers'

ambitions.

But where Meredith created believable figures in Victor and Nataly, characterization in Denzil Quarrier is generally unsatisfactory, and conduct insufficiently motivated. There is, for example, Denzil's completely unnecessary disclosure of Lillian's history to an old friend, Eustace Glazzard. There is Glazzard's equally unbelievable decision to trace Lillian's husband and inform him of her whereabouts. Glazzard's indolent nature unfits him for the role of Iago. Then, Gissing seems not to have been able to decide what to do with Lillian. Part of the time she is a weak, ineffective sort of person; yet during Denzil's campaign she becomes a sparkling hostess and energetic campaigner. The appearance of her husband reduces her to hysteria, but she determines not to be Denzil's disgrace and commits suicide to release him.

Gissing uses the novel to offer criticism of contemporary mores, as for example, in this speech by Denzil:

Whatever happens, she and I stand together; nothing on earth would induce me to part from her! I want you to understand that. In what I am now going to do, I am led solely and absolutely by desire for our common good. You see, we are face to face with the world's immoral morality. To brave it would be possible, of course, but then we must either go to a foreign country or live here in isolation. I don't want to live permanently abroad, and I do want to go in for activity--political by preference. The result is we must set our faces, tell lies, and hope that fortune will favor us.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ George Gissing, Denzil Quarrier (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1892), pp. 110-111.

The book also transcribes some ridiculous conversations, carried on in all seriousness, on the subject of pernicious literature. Even Longfellow's "Excelsior" is found to be indelicate by the guardians of public morality! And in a further effort to criticize prevailing morality, Gissing contrasts the ideal relationship between Denzil and Lilian with that of the mayor and his wife, who live on terms of "reciprocal disgust" and yet "were regarded as a centre of moral and religious influence, a power against the encroachments of rationalism and its attendant depravity."⁵⁸

Gissing's novel, very much inferior to Meredith's book, is eclipsed by Hardy's penultimate novel, Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891), which contains one of the best known of all fallen women.

In various ways, Tess of the D'Urbervilles stirs one's memories of Adam Bede (1859). Both are stories of dairymaids seduced by wealthy young men of a higher class. Both girls are loved by other men for whom news of the seduction is an almost insurmountable shock. Each girl has a child, unknown to its father, and both babies die. Like Eliot, Hardy uses the motif of the despairing return journey; in fact, Hardy uses several variations of it. Both girls are tried for murder and sentenced to be hanged.

The stories are set for the most part in rich agricultural

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 123.

tural counties, although in the background loom the sterile districts of Stoniton and Flintcomb-Ash. The earlier novel includes a fine descriptive piece in which Adam goes to find Hetty, who is picking currants in the garden where flowers, fruits, and vegetables grow in "careless, half-neglected abundance."⁵⁹

When Adam presents her with the rose he has picked, Hetty puts it in her hair, a gesture he dislikes as a sign of vanity.

Hardy offers a companion scene in which Alec guides Tess about his gardens and picks strawberries and roses for her. At his insistence she adorns herself with the blooms, but later, on her way home in the van, she removes them when she observes people staring at her. Little Totty, in the Poyser garden, is smeared with juice from the cherries she has been eating, but there is none of the symbolism latent in another of Hardy's scenes in which Tess, lured by the sound of Angel's harp, goes into the Talbothays garden which "had been left uncultivated for some years"⁶⁰ and now produces rank weed flowers that stain her hands and arms. The Poyser garden is a healthier one than that at Talbothays.

It would be possible to show additional similarities: the sympathetic portrayals of evangelical preachers, the relationship between the girl's fall and the family's moving, the

⁵⁹ George Eliot, Adam Bede (New York: Harper and Brothers, n. d.), p. 185.

⁶⁰ Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urvilles (London: Macmillan and Company, 1912), p. 158.

marriages of the disillusioned men to women who must replace their first ideals.

It is almost as if Thomas Hardy, having read Adam Bede, laid the book aside and determined to create as the counterpart of Hetty Sorrel a girl who should be everything that Hetty was not, and should still come to the same end. Behind the undertaking would lie a philosophy diametrically opposed to George Eliot's. If Adam Bede was written to demonstrate that all acts have inevitable consequences, Hardy would show that people are victims, not of their deeds, but of a malevolent destiny, of economic necessity, or of outworn creeds and conventions. Surprisingly, his fallen woman, Tess Durbeyfield, triumphs over thesis and machinery to become one of the unforgettable characters of literature.

Hardy's heroine, then, is another pretty country girl like Hetty Sorrel, whose rural charms captivated Arthur Donithorne. Where Hetty is an orphan, being brought up by sober, industrious relatives, respected in the community, Tess's parents are living, and she has numerous younger brothers and sisters. The improvident, shiftless Durbeyfields contrast sharply with the Poysers. Notice John Durbeyfield's fuddled pride in his ancestry and his wife's dreams that Tess will marry a rich "kinsman." While Hetty's guardians plan for her a marriage that should provide economic security with a man who loves her, the Durbeyfields sacrifice their most worthy member to their own folly.

But the main difference lies in the characters of the two girls. Hetty is vain and selfish, as indifferent to the young cousins as to her grandfather; Tess loves her family. Not that Tess is blind to the faults of her parents. Our admiration for her is increased exactly because she is aware of their weaknesses. But if she is capable of looking reproachfully at her parents, she feels even more self-reproach--for going club-walking while Joan bends over the wash, for killing the horse, and for bringing the taint of disgrace upon her brothers and sisters. Love and self-reproach send her to Trantridge, move her to give them Angel's money, and at last, to resume adultery with Alec. Vanity and selfishness, which motivated Hetty, have no place in Tess's make-up.

Tess matures; Hetty does not. Almost overnight Tess develops from the girl who could find pleasure in the club-walking to the woman who says, after the death of Prince, "Why, I danced and laughed only yesterday! . . . To think that I was such a fool!"⁶¹ And yet she does not mature all at once. After her return from Trantridge, she can forget for a little while the fact that she is pregnant to enjoy the admiration of her unsuspecting friends. Soon, however, she broods increasingly on her situation and shuns society. It is the hardy peasant strain that gets the upper hand when she decides, after the

⁶¹Ibid., p. 36.

birth of the child, to work in the fields. The passing of time and the demands upon her work a restoration that makes her question a natural one:

Was once lost always lost really true of chastity? . . . She might prove it false if she could veil by-gones. The recuperative power which pervaded organic nature was surely not denied to maidenhood alone.⁶²

By the time she goes to Talbothays, Tess has to a large extent surmounted the experience and feels hopeful that happiness may be attained somewhere. Hardy interjects, as if to protest what other writers may have implied:

Let the truth be told--women do as a rule live through such humiliations, and regain their spirits, and again look about them with an interested eye. While there's life there's hope is a conviction not so entirely unknown to the "betrayed" as some amiable theorists would have us believe.⁶³

Hardy, at least, was willing to give his heroine a taste of happiness, even if he forbade a full swallow. How well he captures the idyllic days at Talbothays, Tess's brimming love, her gentle pride, and her alternation between hope and fear as she "walks out" with Angel Clare. But perhaps he is even better at portraying her meekness and endurance when trouble comes. Of her, Carl J. Weber writes:

Tess is an inspiring figure. Steadfast, loyal, self-effacing, brave, like Marty South, with none of the vanity or deceitfulness so often found in Hardy's heroines, with an emotional fire that would have melted any man's heart except Angel Clare's, with a fortitude in the face of

⁶² Ibid., p. 126.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 135.

adversity and a self-sacrificing devotion to others that make her the finest woman in all the Wessex Novels, Tess is a figure of tragic strength. In her love for Clare, Hardy truly declares, "there was hardly a touch of earth." She is beaten and crushed at last, but not until she has to choose between her own seemingly worthless body and the life of her mother and her destitute brothers and sisters.⁶⁴

While Tess of the D'Urvilles suggests that its author owes something to Adam Bede, the important contributions of the novel are Hardy's own. Most significant of these, of course, is the portrait of Tess which, belonging in the category of great heroines of fiction, certainly occupies a foremost place in the smaller category of fallen women. For the suspense of the seduction plot, Hardy substitutes another interest, Tess's struggle over whether she should tell Angel about her past. The sin-and-repentance motif has disappeared in favor of the romance with Angel where human love takes the place of divine in her rehabilitation.

There is also social criticism in Hardy's novel. Perhaps no other novelist has so dramatically presented male hypocrisy as does Hardy in the scene where Clare, who has just confessed his own lapse, cannot forgive that of his wife. It is a powerful indictment of the double standard against which Mrs. Gaskell had protested long before in Ruth.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Hardy of Wessex: His Life and Literary Career (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), pp. 132-133.

⁶⁵ That restrictions still existed in 1891 is evident from the fact that Hardy had to make several changes in the

This kind of unequivocal protest is absent from novels written in the naturalist manner. One of these vividly details the degeneration of a girl who has an opportunity to rise above her misfortune, but who, for undefined reasons, does not reform.

Arthur Golding, in George Gissing's Workers in the Dawn (1880), is one of the sensitive, altruistic young men whom Gissing presents repeatedly in his novels. He seems on the way to a comfortable, useful life when he notices in his rooming house the pretty niece of his landlady. Shortly thereafter he learns that she is pregnant and deserted by her betrayer. Golding pays her room rent, but one day the girl leaves the house, unable, she writes in a note, to endure her aunt's reproaches any longer. On Christmas night she returns, with a child, and begs unsuccessfully for shelter. As Golding and a friend come home through the snowstorm, they find her crouched in a doorway, the infant, now dead, in her arms. They have her taken to a hospital, and when she recovers sufficiently, Arthur Golding, who is sure he loves her, arranges that she shall lodge near his own rooming house. Although he requests that she not go out alone, she deceives him by attending music hall entertainments and then insisting that she has not gone out. Such incidents are not enough, however, to deter him from

story, which appeared first in The Graphic in serial form from July through December, 1891. He replaced the seduction story by a mock marriage and omitted the birth of the child. In the end, Tess and Alec are friends, not lovers, and the murder is unmotivated. See Mary Ellen Chase's Thomas Hardy from Serial to Novel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1927).

marrying the girl.

After the marriage there are increasing signs that Golding has made a serious mistake, although he does not soon acknowledge it. Carrie is jealous of his visit to an old friend; she resents his unwillingness to take her to the theatre; she will make no effort to improve her speech and writing under his patient direction. Increasingly she becomes ill-tempered and obstinate. In a short time, Arthur discovers that she secretly uses household money to buy liquor, a fact which she brazenly denies. One day he returns home to find that she has left him. At first he lives in an agony of self-accusation which drives him nearly to suicide, but from which he is saved by a friend. During his period of physical and emotional recovery, he meets Helen Norman, an idealistic heroine, who does social work in the slums.

Meanwhile, Carrie has taken up prostitution. Cursing and brawling, she and her companions move like furies in and out of Arthur's life. On one occasion she makes her drunken way to his boarding house and announces herself as his wife. When Helen Norman learns that Arthur has a wife, she renounces her interest in him and persuades him that he has a duty to perform to Carrie, degraded though she may be. He accepts it and goes in search of her, finding her eventually in a cheap hall, apparently naked, appearing in a lewd pantomime. "'I am not fit to be your wife,'" she says, in answer to his re-

quest that she once more live with him. He replies, "'You are more fit than when we first met. You have suffered severely; you are better able to understand the pleasures of a quiet, virtuous life.'"⁶⁶

For a time this seems to be the case. However, Arthur's tastes and pleasures cannot be Carrie's. After a while the old craving for liquor overtakes her; she pawns or sells household articles; she fills the house with the sound of her clamour. At last Arthur realizes the hopelessness of her condition and leaves, making arrangements that she shall be paid a regular sum. He is in Niagara when he learns that she is in a hospital and that hope of her recovery is slight. The same post brings word of the death of Helen Norman. Indifferent now to what life may hold for him, Arthur Golding commits suicide by throwing himself into the falls.

In a comparison of Workers in the Dawn with Dickens's Bleak House, Mabel Collins Donnelly says that the tone of Gissing's work is modern, among other reasons, because "where Dickens provides for retribution, with the humbling of proud Sir Leicester and the death of Lady Dedlock, Gissing permits proud Gresham to flourish and shows both the slow death by

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George Gissing, Workers in the Dawn, 2 vols. ed. Robert Shafer (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935), II, 384.

debauchery of Carrie Mitchell and the swift death of the virtuous Helen Norman."⁶⁷

The tone of the book is modern in still another respect. Carrie Mitchell, given the opportunity to redeem herself when she becomes the wife of a good man does not reform but sinks to complete degradation, ruining Arthur Golding in the process. Since Defoe, no recognized author had presented so graphically and in such detail the progressive degeneration of a young woman. Equally far removed from the picture that Gissing drew were novels that were printed in the decade immediately preceding 1880. They included two conventional sketches of pathetic victims by Trollope, three optimistic views from Reade and Collins, purporting to show that all a woman needed was a chance to be redeemed, and two figures from Hardy--the shadowy Fanny and the haughty Eustacia.

This is not to say that Gissing's multiplication of sordid detail is entirely gain. Convincing as some of these descriptions of debauchery may be, their abundance cannot substitute for an answer to the question--why is Carrie unreclaimable? When Arthur found her, she could not yet have had a long career of infamy. How does she become so enslaved to drink? What was her background? Because Gissing nowhere analyzes Carrie's state of mind, as he does Helen's or Arthur's, the reader is

⁶⁷ Mabel Collins Donnelly, George Gissing: Grave Comedian (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 67.

left ignorant of the contradictory motives that may be there, which are suggested only by the fact that occasionally she briefly shows a desire to reform her ways. As is usual with Gissing, sexual drives are not discussed at all.

Carrie's role in the story is to affect the lives of the main characters, Arthur and Helen, and to reflect Gissing's disillusionment with some of the optimistic views of his time. Structurally, her disintegration parallels Helen's growth in mental and spiritual powers. One woman degrades Arthur; the other inspires him.

Another very realistic novel, this one by George Moore, develops a similar theme.⁶⁸ Walter Allen speaks of A Mummer's Wife (1885) as a "quite impressive attempt to fuse Madame Bovary with Zola's L'Assommoir."⁶⁹ Written under the influence of French naturalism, Moore's story traces the rapid degeneration of Kate Ede, pretty wife of an asthmatic shopkeeper, after she elopes with a traveling actor. (Many of its scenes remind one of Gissing's Workers in the Dawn.)

⁶⁸ It had been preceded by A Modern Lover (1883) which Moore revised and entitled Lewis Seymour and Some Women when it appeared in 1917. In it, two wealthy women sacrifice themselves to an artist. The first, who is his patron, is supplanted by a young noblewoman who actually offers herself to him and consents only reluctantly to legalize the affair. Both Mudie's and Smith's libraries kept the book under the counter after readers objected to it. The most startling thing about it is probably its frank references to usually unmentioned parts of the body.

⁶⁹ Allen, pp. 283-284.

For this novel, Moore chose as epigraph a passage from Duruy's L'Introduction Générale à l'Histoire de France: "Change the surroundings in which a man lives and in two or three generations you will have changed his physical constitution, his habits of life, and a goodly number of his ideas."⁷⁰ To illustrate this thesis, Moore invented the story of Kate Ede. He faced two problems: to motivate her elopement and to motivate the recourse to drink that would ruin her.

To begin with, he presents Kate as something of a dreamer whose earlier reading in sentimental romances and poetry has encouraged her to imagine more pleasant things when the demands of everyday life discourage her. These demands are not excessive, however, nor is she ineffective in coping with them. True, her husband is often petulant when he is ill, but it is exactly when he is suffering most that she loves him best. She is also a capable dressmaker and maintains excellent relations with her assistant and the two girls who learn sewing from her. Although often exasperated by her mother-in-law's strict ways, Kate knows the older woman loves her, and she, in turn, appreciates Mrs. Ede. At the conclusion of a typical day, Kate may stand wearily in her doorway and watch darkness descend, but she can carry with her, when she goes in, a satisfaction that comes

⁷⁰ Quoted by William Frierson, The English Novel in Transition, 1885-1940 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), p. 67.

from "duties honestly accomplished."⁷¹

The tenor of her life is radically changed on the day when Dick Lennox, manager of a troupe of players, rents a spare room in their house. He brings with him the air of a world that has been forbidden to the Edes, that of the theatre. Lennox's presence in the house at a time when Kate is more than usually harassed by lack of sleep and overwork tends to make her think longingly of such pleasures as she assumes are available at the theatre.

By the time the troupe moves to another city, Lennox has found a number of ways in which to stir in Kate the old sentimental longings which have lain dormant for years. While Dick may sometimes strike the reader as more clown than hero, it is necessary to keep in mind the author's intention that Lennox shall, in Kate's mind at least, come closer than any other man to her idea of a storybook hero.

When the actors keep a return engagement some months later, Lennox persuades Kate's husband, on whom he has made a favorable impression, to let Kate attend one of their performances. It is evidently the last influence she needs to relax her guard, for the music carries her away into a romantic dream world. The next night she permits herself to be drawn into Dick's room. After that her only fear is that when the company

⁷¹ George Moore, A Mummer's Wife (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1936), p. 31.

leaves town, she must stay behind. When Lennox suggests that she go with them, she agrees, explaining:

You're everything to me! I never knew what happiness was till I saw you; I've never had any amusement, I've never had any love; it was nothing but drudgery from morning to night. Better be dead than continue such an existence.⁷²

Something of her past training, as well as a premonition of the future is reflected in her next speech:

It's very wicked--I know it is--but I can't help myself. I was brought up religiously, nobody more so, but I never could think of God and forget the world like my mother and Mrs. Ede. I always used to like to read tales about lovers, and I used to feel miserable when they didn't marry in the end and live happily. But then those people were good and pure, and were commanded to love each other, whereas I'm sinful, and shall be punished for my sin. I don't know how that will be; perhaps you'll cease to love me and will leave me. When you cease to love me I hope I shall die. But you'll never do that, Dick; tell me that you will not. You'll remember that I gave up a great deal for you; that I left my home for you; that I left everything.⁷³

Because Moore does not draw a curtain over the elopement and subsequent events, he is able to suggest how gradually Kate's first feelings of guilt evaporate in the incessant noise and activity of a traveling company. She even enjoys a measure of success singing in one of their productions. It is ironic that on the night of her triumph she discovers that Dick has been visiting one of the other actresses. Infuriated, Kate falls into a rage that surprises even her.

The time comes when Kate finds herself wishing for a more settled life. Since that is impossible, she remains behind

⁷² Ibid., p. 136.

⁷³ Ibid.

one Sunday so that she may attend church in Leamington while the rest go on to Bath. Afterwards, on her way to rejoin the company, she sobs to her companion that she knows she has been very wicked and God will punish her. Reunited with Dick, she briefly, if unreasonably, accuses him of seducing her and mocking her religion.

That Dick Lennox is not a typical villain is evident from the fact that as soon as he learns Kate is pregnant, he marries her. Soon afterwards the troupe meets reverses, and by the time the child is born, they are penniless and must borrow money to pay their bills. During her recuperation, Kate indulges in sentimental reveries again, fed by stories she reads and the effects of brandy and water prescribed as a stimulant. The child lives only three weeks, dying one night while Kate, who has had too much brandy, is unconscious of its crying.

From that time on, Kate's history is one of rapid degeneration. Insanely jealous of her husband's attentions to other women, she often attacks him physically; she creates scenes at their rehearsals; she drinks immoderately. Lennox, who started out as a seducer, is a surprisingly patient and long-suffering husband, but when her jealous rages and drunken appearances threaten his relations with the other actors, even jeopardize his career, he arranges to have money paid to her regularly, and leaves her. Alone, she deteriorates still more rapidly. When Lennox is called to her deathbed, he finds her

alternately singing snatches of comic opera songs and Wesleyan hymns, sometimes even trying to fit the words of one to the tune of the other, as if trying to reconcile at last what she had not succeeded in doing in life. The symbolism would be more effective if Moore's story had actually presented the conflict at which he had hinted early in the novel when he described the strong religious influences under which Kate has lived most of her life. One expects Kate to have a strong consciousness of sin and to experience a struggle within herself.

In spite of Moore's efforts to make the fall and degradation credible, the disaster of Kate's life seems more contrived than inevitable. After leaving Hanley she never wished to go back to that town and her old life there. Dick Lennox proved to be a gentle and patient husband who could forgive even the physical violence she did to him. By emphasizing Kate's novel reading and her imagination, Moore seems to be suggesting that she will soon or late become disillusioned also with Lennox and the theatre, but this does not happen. Instead, an overpowering jealousy and a craving for drink appear.

One of Moore's critics offers this interpretation:

Moore's point seemed to be that the lower middle classes should beware of aspirations toward self-realization. This idea was of course borrowed from Madame Bovary, whose heroine, like Kate Ede, prepared her downfall by reading 'romantic' novels according to the law that the

loss of one inhibition is equivalent to losing all.⁷⁴

Moore seems to have forgotten that the thesis with which he started speaks of man's changing radically in two or three generations when his surroundings are changed. Kate's deterioration--from dutiful wife to alcoholic shrew--requires only a few years' time. While he treats his subject much more frankly than many writers had dared to do, Moore's freedom does not serve him well in the portrayal of Kate Ede. Two later novels, Evelyn Innes and Sister Teresa, show him much more successfully exploring the theme of conflict between love and religion.

The outstanding example of the naturalist treatment of a fallen woman in English fiction during these decades must be a matter-of-fact account of a slum girl's misfortune in W. Somerset Maugham's Liza of Lambeth (1897). A subject shrouded by George Eliot gets frank airing in the first conversation in the book as one slum dweller says to another on a hot August afternoon, "'You'll be 'avin your little trouble soon, eh, Polly?'" To which Polly answers, "'Oh, I reckon I've got another two months to go yet.'" And a third offers, "'I

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Malcolm Brown, George Moore: A Reconsideration (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955), p. 93. Brown, incidentally, describes Esther Waters and A Mummer's Wife as "two of the dozen most perfectly wrought novels to appear in the English realistic tradition . . . not out of place in the company of the best novels of the language." Ibid., xi.

wouldn't 'ave thought you'd go so long by the look of yer!"⁷⁵

It is an apt introduction to the story of Liza. For Liza Kemp has little in common with the fallen women who preceded her in literature. A factory worker, she does not languish under ill treatment or poor pay. Uninhibited by moral or religious teachings, without ideologies of any kind, she has no aspirations for anything better than bright new clothing and a good time, which she can find in a boys' cricket game as well as in an impromptu street dance. Quick-tongued, high-spirited, she is a general favorite. Yet she is shrewd enough to hide her earnings from her mother, lest that matron use them to buy liquor.

Maugham's story describes the brief, illicit romance between Liza and Jim Blakeston, a married man with five children. The affair begins suddenly the first Saturday in August; it ends, three months later when Liza, severely beaten by Jim's strong wife, has a miscarriage and dies, unconscious of his presence at her deathbed. In between, Liza knows the happiness of loving the masterful Jim, as well as the disappointment of losing the esteem of her neighbors.

The lives of these Cockney lovers parallel in rough outline those of their more fashionable counterparts in middle class and higher society. They have the problem of keeping their relations secret. There is the dilemma presented by Jim's

⁷⁵W. Somerset Maugham, Liza of Lambeth (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), p. 4.

wife and children, and Liza's feeling of responsibility for her mother. Other girls might think of loving parents and hesitate to injure them. Liza says of her mother:

Thet's true, she ain't been wot yer might call a good mother to me--but some'ow she's my mother, an' I don't like ter leave 'er on 'er own, now she's old--an' she can't do much with the rheumatics. An' besides, Jim dear, it ain't only mother, but there's yer own kids, yer can't leave them.⁷⁶

When it becomes evident to Liza that her slum neighbors do not look on her with as much favor as formerly, she feels some of her old verve leaving her. One time she and Jim even quarrel because they are both on edge, but their lovers' quarrel is a bit more violent than that of politer circles; he bruises her face and leaves a mark which she is embarrassed to explain.

The seduction is treated more frankly than in most of the other novels of this and the earlier period. When Jim asks three times, "'Will yer?'" it is evident what he has in mind. And Liza's passion for her burly lover is clearly presented.

It does not matter, in the end, who or what is to blame for the tragedy of Liza Kemp. Sin and repentance, once so prominent in many treatments of the subject, have no place in Maugham's book. There is no condemnation of vice or concern for morality. The author, directly or indirectly, expresses no intention to do good, no desire to reform men and women, no plea

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 162.

for the poor. The descriptions are objective, often brutal; the method omits analysis, offers action without commentary.

CHAPTER IV

THE FALLEN WOMAN AS PROTAGONIST: 1870-1900

Side by side with the novel in which a fallen woman appears as a victim stands the book in which she may play a role as part victim and part protagonist, following the dictates of her heart or deliberately flaunting conventional mores to call attention to certain evils in society, even if such courses bring ignominy and suffering to her.

One such woman, the reformed prostitute who wastes little time lamenting her past, is presented in a novel published a year after Trollope's The Vicar of Bullhampton. With this subject of a former "kept woman" in A Terrible Temptation (1871) Charles Reade ventured a second time into the Victorian lion's den. He had been there before with a story of bigamy in Griffith Gaunt (1866).¹ When adverse criticisms appeared, he was not intimidated and launched into another correspondence to demonstrate exactly how fallacious some of the long-cherished notions about proper subject matter actually were.

On August 24, 1871, The London Times printed a criticism of Charles Reade's A Terrible Temptation that prompted its

¹ See Wayne Burns, Charles Reade: A Study in Victorian Authorship (New York: Bookman Associates, 1961) for details of the controversy over Griffith Gaunt.

author to a quick defense. Reade's answer indicates what was expected of writers and how he, for one, was trying to satisfy the public taste. He wrote to the Times editor:

My abridger has said that I have written about things which should not be spoken of, much less written about--alluding to my sketch of Rhoda Somerset--and that innocent girls ought not to be informed on such subjects. He even hints that mothers would do well to forbid my first volume to their unmarried daughters.

He then shows that this subject, like so many of his others, has come straight from the pages of The Times and that he has tried to imitate that newspaper's treatment of the matter.

Whatever warmth I have shown is in the scenes of virtuous love; in the Somerset scenes I am cold and sarcastic. Up to the period of her repentance how do I treat the character? Do I whitewash the hussy, or make her a well-bred, delicate minded woman, as your refined and immoral writers would? I present her illiterate, coarse, vain, with good impulses, a bad temper, and a Billingsgate tongue. In close contrast to this unattractive photograph I am careful to place my portrait of an English virgin, drawn in the sweetest colours my rude art can command, that every honest reader may see on which side my sympathies lie, and be attracted to virtue by the road of comparison.

Reade concludes logically that if mothers forbid their daughters to read A Terrible Temptation, they must also forbid them to read The Times.²

Two months later, Reade sent a very long letter to the Toronto Daily Globe, protesting their misrepresentation of the same novel. (The Globe did not print the letter, but Reade included it in Readiana.) The charges were similar to those printed in the Times: public morality had been offended because

²Charles Reade, Readiana: Comments on Current Events (London: Chatto & Windus, 1896), pp. 304-306.

he had made a courtesan the most interesting character; he had minimized her degradation and blamed her only slightly; he had made a fornicator the "model man" in the book.

Reade's defense is that the virtuous Lady Bassett is the most interesting character, and that the former mistress is interesting only as a penitent for whom his sympathy grows only in proportion as she becomes "better and better." Moreover, he has drawn illicit passion with cold reserve. Virtuous love has received glowing treatment. As far as Bassett's role goes, Reade says he has been concerned to show that he disapproved strongly of his early licentious conduct and has made him suffer for it.³

When the story opens, Sir Charles Bassett has asked beautiful Arabella Bruce to marry him. Her consent means that now he must dispose of his mistress, Rhoda Somerset. The subject is treated without any of the pathos that usually marked the account of such events. True, Rhoda stages a great scene and vows to kill Arabella, but she shrewdly agrees to a generous settlement: four hundred pounds a year while she remains unmarried, two hundred after that, the lease of the house and furnishings, her brown mare, and the ponies.

In spite of Reade's disclaiming any intention to present Rhoda as interesting during her "frail career," he lets

³ Ibid., pp. 260-265.

her admirers speak with appreciation of her charms and personality. She "'gives herself wonderful airs,'" says one, and another answers, "'So would any woman that was as beautiful, and as witty, and as much run after as she is. Why, she is a leader of fashion. Look at all the ladies following her round the Park.'" Someone points out a young fellow as the person who "launched" her into the society she "devastates." "'She looks like a queen, and steps like an empress,'" says another.⁴

Admitted to her boudoir, Richard Bassett, Sir Charles's cousin and rival, discovers "Luxury's nest."

The walls were rose-coloured satin, padded and puckered; the voluminous curtains were pale satin, with floods and billows of real lace; the chairs embroidered, the table all buhl and ormolu, and the sofas felt like little seas. The lady herself, in a delightful peignoir, sat nestled cosily in a sort of ottoman with arms. Her finely formed hand, clogged with brilliants, was just conveying brandy and soda-water to a very handsome mouth when Richard Bassett entered.⁵

Vandeleur, the young rake who first discovered her as a barelegged shrimp girl at the seashore, describes some tempestuous times he endured with her until she became so puffed up with flattery that he had to turn her out, although not until she had craftily obtained the horse he had promised her. But, there is another side to her, and he adds, prophetically:

Now, you know, she had her good points, after all. If any creature was ill, she'd sit up all night and nurse them; and she used to go to church on Sundays, and come

⁴Charles Reade, A Terrible Temptation: A Story of the Day (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), pp. 7-9.

⁵Ibid., p. 11.

back with the sting out of her; only then she would preach to a fellow, and bore him. She is awfully fond of preaching. Her dream is to jump on a first-rate hunter, and ride across country and preach the villages.⁶

There is nothing of the social outcast about Rhoda, before or after Bassett dismisses her. When Arabella's father forbids his daughter to marry Sir Charles because he has been reported calling on his former mistress, Rhoda tries in various ways to patch up the affair. One time she speaks matter-of-factly to Admiral Bruce:

Come, old gentleman, don't you be too hard--you are not a child, like your daughter; take the world as it is. Do you think you will ever find a man of fortune who has not had a lady friend? Why, every single gentleman in London, that can afford to keep a saddle-horse, has an article of that sort in some corner or other; and if he parts with her as soon as his banns are cried, that is all you can expect.⁷

Reade also permits Bella's aunt to make light of Bassett's affair when she says:

Why, it is common, universal amongst men of fashion. I am so vexed it ever came to Bella's knowledge; really it is dreadful to me as a mother, that such a thing should have been discussed before that child. Complete innocence means complete ignorance, and that is how all my girls went to their husbands.⁸

Only a very superficial reader must have failed to notice that Reade's blunt statement of prevailing notions somehow doesn't ring true in this passage which was obviously written with tongue in cheek.

⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

Once Bella and Sir Charles are married, Reade turns his attention to what is the main subject of his book, the conflict between two cousins over inherited property. Among other things, the disgruntled Richard intends to use against Sir Charles a letter which has gotten into the hands of Rhoda. This provides Reade with the opportunity to bring her back into the story, and she reappears magnificently, on a chestnut gelding, accompanied by a young man, Marsh. She brings the letter, and also news that she is going to marry Mr. Marsh. Bella, ignorant of her real identity, calls her "good," and invites the two to visit her. At parting she embraces Rhoda, which moves her to break into tears and sob, "'O God, you are good to sinners! This is the happiest hour of my life--it is a forerunner. Bless you, sweet dove of innocence!'"⁹

For good measure, and to serve a useful purpose in his sensational plot, Reade includes another fallen woman, Rhoda's half-sister, Mary. A maid in Sir Charles's house, she is seduced by Richard under promise of marriage. However, Richard is not so honorable as Sir Charles, and, having made another marriage in the meantime, he now accuses Mary of trying to trap him. Mary's problem is solved without his help when the childless Lady Bassett agrees to pass the child off as her own. It leaves Mary free to marry a rich, elderly farmer.

⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

Some elaborate scheming is involved, but Reade does not flinch at improbabilities.

Strangely enough, what Mary fears most during her difficulty is that her half-sister will discover her situation. Now that Rhoda has reformed, she goes about the villages preaching, her husband in leash. Reade says:

Rhoda Marsh had become a good Christian in every respect but one. The male rake reformed is rather tolerant, but the female rake reformed is, as a rule, bitterly intolerant of female frailty; and Rhoda carried this female characteristic to an extreme, both in word and in deed.¹⁰

Here, as elsewhere, Reade deals in extremes as the following incidents bear out.

On one occasion Rhoda finds Vandeleur in an asylum, hiding from his creditors. After reprimanding him sharply, she gives him money to pay his debts, then asks him to kneel so that she may pray for him. He is impressed by her evident sincerity.

Towards the end of his story Reade quotes a sermon Mrs. Marsh preaches on the village green, in which she deplores quite openly the hostility between the two Bassett families. When she attempts to convert her sister, now married for the second time, she has little success. Mary rebels and protests that all Rhoda knows is, Repent! Repent! "Why, you be like a cuckoo, all in one song. One would think I had been and robbed a church. 'Tis all very well for you to repent, as led

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

a fastish life at starting; but I never done nothing as I'm ashamed on."¹¹

The author wrote to the Times that he had made an "unattractive photograph" of Rhoda Somerset to contrast with the ideal portrait of Bella. The "unattractive photograph" does not materialize, however. Rhoda, although not complex, is interesting, far more so than the Griselda-like Lady Bassett.

It is true that Reade does not make her a temptress, the boudoir scene notwithstanding. In fact, she is much more convincing as a business woman than a courtesan. Hers are the traits generally considered to be masculine ones: she is practical, bargains shrewdly, speaks bluntly, knows when she is beaten, tolerates her rapacious relatives, extricates her friends from difficulties, and rides her horse like a man.

In another way, Reade defies literary convention. He lets Rhoda repent quickly and with her accustomed gusto take up a new career. No shame attaches to her; she is not haunted by remorse; she does not harbor ill feelings toward the men whose mistress she has been. She continues to enjoy the comforts that wealth buys; she has an adoring husband who knows about her past; and she goes about preaching, not as a penance, but because she enjoys it. Hers is the happy life; Bella's is the troubled one.

The reader will look in vain for psychological analysis

¹¹ Ibid., p. 351.

of Rhoda. Since Reade is much better at depicting action than he is at presenting motivation, this failure is probably not due to the restrictions under which novelists worked.

A writer who makes more of an effort to motivate his subject's reformation is Gissing, whose first novel, Workers in the Dawn, had portrayed a woman who could not be rehabilitated. Seven years before Thomas Hardy offered Tess as a "pure" woman, Gissing created a character for his novel, The Unclasssed (1884), who is described repeatedly by another character as a "pure" woman, in spite of the fact that she is earning her living by prostitution. Nor is she ready to accept the conventional estimation of a person like herself, for she protests that she cannot understand all the talk about shame and disgrace.

Until she is ten years old, Ida Starr enjoys a comfortable childhood, unaware that her mother is a prostitute, although of the "better" sort, who preserves an air of respectability in which to bring up her daughter. A peevish schoolmate, Harriet Smales, is the first person to inform Ida that her mother is a woman of the streets. Passionate when aroused, Ida knocks the girl unconscious with her slate, then sits on the floor, cradling the girl's bloody head in her lap until the schoolmistress arrives. Dismissal from school follows, but it is only a secondary trouble. For Ida's mother lies ill in her room and

does not recover. Shortly before her death she sends Ida to make peace with her wealthy grandfather, who offers her a home, which Ida impetuously refuses because she senses the hostility between her mother and this stern man.

Here Gissing leaves the story of Ida Starr for six chapters. Near the end of Volume One she reappears when her path crosses that of Osmond Waymark, a liberal-minded young schoolteacher. One night in Pall Mall he is approached by a miserable prostitute whose obvious wretchedness so touches him that he gives her all the money in his pocket. When she has gone, he is addressed by a graceful, well-dressed girl who has witnessed the scene and evidently approves his conduct. Waymark appreciates her lively comments and lovely face, but remarks that he is sorry to have seen it for he will think of it hereafter, marked by suffering and degradation. She is quick to resent the word "degradation." How does he know, she asks, if she has any choice in the matter?

This is Ida Starr, now a beautiful woman of eighteen. She asks Waymark to be her friend, stipulating that they shall meet as if she is a modest, respectable girl when he comes to call on her. In her attractive rooms, Waymark notices her "sweet, pure face, the eyes and lips with their contained mirth, the light, perfect form, the graceful carriage," . . . and feels "his pulses throb at the sound of her voice and the touch

of her hand."¹² Even before he has heard the story of her life, Waymark assures her, "'My ideal woman is the one who, knowing every darkest secret of life, keeps yet a pure mind,--as you do, Ida.'"¹³

One day he learns the story of Ida's experiences after her mother's death. (There are some striking similarities between it and that told by Mercy Merrick in The New Magdalen.) At first she was a child-drudge in an eating house where the husband and wife, each in his own way, made life unbearable for her. At last she ran away, to live for a while by begging. One day, a kind, eccentric woman found her and decided to keep her as a lady's maid. Six years later, after the woman's death, Ida was again homeless and friendless. For a while she slaved at a laundry, leaving it when an opportunity to become a maid opened up to her. There the work was impossibly hard and her employers so cruel that one day she left the house, although she had no idea what she would do or where she would go. On the street she was intercepted by her employer's son, who persuaded her to become his mistress, an arrangement which, in her despair, she accepted. At the time of her meeting with Waymark she has broken off with young Bolter. Evidently others have replaced him and now provide the comforts she enjoys.

¹² George Gissing, The Unclassed (London: Chapman and Hall, 1884), II, p. 7.

¹³ Ibid., p. 72.

In one of their talks together, Ida reveals to Waymark that she does not have the conventional prostitute's opinion of herself. She has read his copy of The Vicar of Wakefield and asks him whether he would feel disgraced forever if a daughter of his should do what Olivia Primrose did. She cannot understand all the talk about shame and disgrace and concludes, "What worse is she than she was before? Suppose it all happened secretly, and there an end of it, well, wouldn't it be the same as if it had never happened?"¹⁴

Waymark replies that people believe in contamination of the soul, but agrees with her that it is absurd. "I fancy the truth is this. If you believe yourself to be made impure by any piece of conduct, you are in fact made so; otherwise not What one may do and be no worse for, another must not venture upon. Do you see what I mean?"¹⁵

She asks him then, "Do you think I am degraded,-- hopelessly and forever impure, however I might alter my life?"

His answer is, "I think nothing of the kind."¹⁶ But he reminds her that the life she is leading frequently does end in real degradation. She assures him that she will gladly give

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

up the trade as soon as she can find a decent mode of earning a living that will not reduce her to slavery.

In contrast to Ida, Gissing presents Maud Enderby, the girl to whom Waymark is engaged. By nature a highly sensitive person, Maud has through training and environment come to regard every natural impulse as a temptation to be resisted with all her strength. She is always troubled by a strong consciousness of sin, something which Ida says nothing about.¹⁷

There is a period of several months during which Waymark hears nothing from Ida. Then, summoned to a new address by her note, he discovers that she has given up prostitution and has returned to the laundry. Now he realizes that she is enduring hardship in the hope of gaining his respect, and perhaps, his love.¹⁸

¹⁷ Jacob Korg reports that The Unclassed was refused by the publisher Bentley because it did not present Ida as sufficiently degraded. Such an attractive prostitute was dangerous morality. (George Gissing: A Critical Biography [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963]), p. 62.

¹⁸ Ida Starr is not rehabilitated by Waymark's direct persuasion as Mabel Collins Donnelly suggests in George Gissing: The Grave Comedian (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 71 when she writes, "Thus after persuading Ida that self-respect and the back-breaking drudgery of the sweatshop are preferable to the comparative comfort of prostitution, Waymark finds that his own desire for the girl is aroused." Actually, Gissing writes: "In the case of an ordinary pretty and good-natured girl falling in his way as Ida Starr had done, he would have exerted whatever influence he might acquire over her to persuade her into better paths. Any such direct guidance was, he felt, out of the question here. The girl had independence of judgment; she would resent anything said by him on the assumption of her moral inferiority, and, for aught he knew, with justice." The Unclassed, II, 3.

Through her love for Waymark, Ida's aspirations are changed. She desires nothing so much as the conventional existence of a woman who has never violated society's moral code. She enjoys domestic duties; she agrees to the association with Harriet Smales Castl because the request comes from Waymark and because she hopes to show herself capable of friendship with a married woman. Sensitive to Waymark's attention and moods, she dreads the possibility that another woman already occupies the foremost place in his affections. But she will not compromise her new position, even after her dismissal from the laundry occurs and she is brought to the verge of starvation. Writing to Waymark, she asks him to send her money. He must not misunderstand her asking.

At this point, Gissing introduces the chain of events that lead to Ida's reconciliation with her wealthy grandfather. However, her new position as an heiress does not bring her happiness because the estrangement from Waymark grows.

Sometimes she rehearses the confession she would like to make to him, in which she would tell him that love gave her strength to give up luxury for lonely toil, to prove to herself that she was not hopelessly degraded. When she was falsely accused and unjustly jailed, only one thought gave her agony, that he might believe her guilty. When her grandfather's fortune became hers, it gave joy for one reason, that he might see how she would use her opportunities. Her confession would conclude:

It is no arrogance to say that I am become a pure woman; not my own merits, but love of you has made me so; love that came upon me with the power of a blessing from Heaven. I love you as a woman loves only once; if you asked me to give up my life to prove it, I am capable of doing no less a thing than that. Flesh and spirit I lay before you,--all yours; do you still think the offering unworthy?¹⁹

But at the same time she is forming the declaration she knows that she will never speak so to him. If the occasion came, she would be too humble.

Then Waymark accepts a position in Birmingham. On his farewell visit he says, "When I go away, I shall take with me the remembrance of you as of the one perfect woman."²⁰

It emboldens her to say that she will be unhappy unless he shares her wealth, which she now surmises is the obstacle between them, until he explains reluctantly that he is not free to marry her. At first the announcement staggers her, but recovering quickly, she understands how he must blame himself and how he is torn between his duty to Maud and his now-recognized love for herself. She asks his forgiveness and, obviously sincere, wishes him happiness.

If Waymark had needed proof of Ida's goodness and true worth, it was here, in her unselfish withdrawal immediately after confessing that she loved him, and in her ardent wishes

¹⁹ Ibid., III, 244.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 255.

for his happiness.²¹

Gissing might have ended the story at this point. He provided, however, that Waymark's fiancée should be hysterical and hypersensitive. One day she tells him that they cannot marry. At his suggestion, they wait six months before reaching a final decision, but at the end of that time she asks again for a release. Ida receives a letter with the glad news that no obstacles remain to their union. Although the novel does not include the marriage, the reader is led to believe that at last the two will find happiness together, the one-time "kept woman" and the liberal thinker-writer, who learned a great deal about love from the woman he once thought incapable of the genuine emotion.

This résumé should make clear that in 1884 George Gissing presented an unusual prostitute. Ida Starr is first of all a woman, beautiful, intelligent, lively, and sensitive. The reader is not asked to pity her. She is not enslaved by vice nor consumed by remorse. She does not pity herself. She frankly admits that there are other ways to earn a living, but they are hard, and drudgery has no appeal for her. Luxury-loving, she can also do without material comforts for the sake of Waymark's approval although, woman-like, she buys a few new clothes with money saved out of her slender wages so that she

²¹ One detects in the story a good deal of wishful thinking. Gissing's own marriage to a prostitute had turned out like that of Arthur Golding and Carrie Mitchell in Workers in the Dawn.

may be attractive to the man she loves.

This love refines Ida and makes her able to endure physical hardship, unjust accusation, even imprisonment. In the last test she nobly and sincerely wishes Waymark and Maud every happiness. Through Ida's story in The Unclassed, Gissing affirms the values of discipline and self-control, of doing one's duty, of serving others, and, most of all, of the rehabilitating power of love. Both Ida and Waymark are ennobled by their love for each other, a love based finally on much more than physical attraction.

Although Gissing is quite as reticent about prostitution as novelists who preceded him in the nineteenth century had been, he dares to avoid the suffering, miserable stereotype to create instead, in the words of Mabel Collins Donnelly, "the first of the wonderfully credible women Gissing would portray so well, at once sensual and virtuous, worldly yet simple."²² And Walter Allen says of The Unclassed, "But the same novel has in Ida Starr, the young prostitute, one of his most charming heroines; with great skill he reveals in her not only real intellectual ability but also the growth of moral and spiritual graciousness."²³ The reason for Gissing's success is largely that he did not see Ida as a prostitute but as a lovely woman with a great potential for love and sacrifice. Like other

²² Donnelly, p. 70.

²³ Allen, p. 280.

of Gissing's works, it is concerned with poverty and reform movements, but it remains, as Jacob Korg has pointed out, "primarily a novel of love and character, though it is heavily charged with social awareness."²⁴

(There actually are two prostitutes in the story, for the girl Sally, who at first lives with Ida, goes into the Strand at night to augment her seamstress wages. She is featured very briefly as Ida's companion, and then marries a worthy young Irishman.)

A more realistic treatment of a woman's struggle for respectability appeared ten years later, from the pen of George Moore. Although portraying a servant girl as unwed mother in Esther Waters (1894), he shows a good deal of independence in his use of the subject. To begin with, Esther is not a ravishing beauty, nor is she of the frail order of heroines. She is sturdily built and has a grave, almost sullen face that depends on her smile to make it attractive.

Unwanted at home, where a stepfather begrudges each mouthful she eats, Esther, at twenty, becomes kitchenmaid at Woodview, estate of the Barfields, whose other servants think of little more than the fine horses the estate produces and the bets they place on the races. Brought up in the strict Plymouth Brethren sect, Esther does not always feel at home among the other

²⁴

Korg, George Gissing: A Critical Biography, p. 64.

servants, but she feels a kinship with Mrs. Barfield when she learns that her mistress is a member of the same church.

One of the liveried servants, William Latch, shows her various attentions, and they are frequently together until one summer evening when Esther, somewhat fuddled from the beer they drank at supper, is not alert enough to prevent his advances. Afterwards, when the teachings of her religion rise to convict her of sin, she refuses to meet William or listen to his declaration that he is fond of her and wishes to marry her. Some sort of instinct tells her that she must refuse forgiveness for a long time in order to gain his respect. Moore analyzes the girl's state of mind shrewdly when he notices that "the natural shame which she had first felt almost disappeared in the violence of her virtue."²⁵ In addition, Esther thinks that William ought also to repent, but there is no indication that he feels as she does.

There are indications of another sort, however. One of the Barfield daughters begins to require an unusual amount of service from William, a development which Esther, who has come to the end of her sullenness, watches with an apprehension which proves to be justified. One day the household is shocked by news of Margaret Barfield's elopement with William.

Esther regards the development as punishment for her sin. But one day she discovers that she is in even greater

²⁵ George Moore, Esther Waters (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1937), p. 73.

trouble: she is pregnant. Knowing how desperate her situation will become, she is practical enough to hide her condition as long as possible, in order to collect her third quarter's wages. When rumors reach Mrs. Barfield's ears, she calls Esther to her and makes sure that the girl will have money enough to see her through her confinement. There is nothing of the stereotype heartless employer about her. Moore presents her as a genuine Christian who, unlike the hypocrites in Collins's story, voluntarily writes a "character" for Esther. At Woodview, even the servants are tolerant and drink to the health of Esther's unborn baby. "We don't think any the worse of you; why that's an accident that might happen to any of us,"²⁶ says one of them. (Mrs. Gaskell's critics would have called it an encouragement to vice.)

But Moore is too realistic not to present the other side of the picture. Esther returns to cruelty and poverty in her stepfather's house. After the birth of her child, a boy, she tries employment as a wet nurse but soon discovers she is expected to neglect her own child. Then she becomes a servant, working long, cruel hours, leaving one place because she can no longer do without adequate rest, being dismissed from another by sanctimonious people who cannot have a "loose" woman in their home. At Charing Cross she sees others, in similar circumstances, who have turned to prostitution. Somehow this plucky

²⁶Ibid., p. 90.

girl survives, convincingly enabled to endure many hardships for her baby's sake, until when the child is six, she is in such straits that the workhouse looms as the only refuge.

At last she obtains employment with a spinster novelist, a kind and generous woman who, after hearing Esther's story, says, "'There aren't many such good women in the world as you, Esther.'" ²⁷

Her work for Miss Rice brings Esther into contact with a stationer's foreman who takes an interest in her spiritual welfare. Another of the pious people whom Moore does not make into hypocrites, Fred is convincingly concerned about Esther's salvation. When he asks her to marry him, she tells him about her past, expecting that it will mean the end of their relationship. His reply is that as long as she has repented, it can make no difference. A visit to his country home, where Esther is accepted by his kind parents, brings her a feeling of genuine happiness. (Readers of Tess of the D'Urbervilles will be struck by similarities in these two stories. Both girls have illegitimate children; both are sought in marriage by "good" men; in both novels the seducer returns at a critical moment.) ²⁸

Just about the time when Esther has decided to marry Fred, she meets William Larch again and learns that he is half-

²⁷ Ibid., p. 180.

²⁸ See also Brown, pp. 135-136.

owner of a nearby public house. His wife has left him for another man. Although she treats him disdainfully, William persists in attempting to meet Esther. (It is certainly not true as Malcolm Brown states that she agrees "almost without hesitation" to marry him.)²⁹ Through nearly four chapters she is swayed now one way, now another as she tries to choose between the two men. In the end, it is the child's admiration for William and William's eagerness to provide a secure future for the boy that make Esther consent to live with him and give his wife ostensible grounds for the divorce. To Fred, who protests that he thought she was a religious woman, Esther replies, wearily, "'Ah, religion is easy enough at times, but there is other times when it don't seem to fit in with a body's duty. I may be wrong, but it seems natural like--he's the father of my child.'" ³⁰ True to his word, William marries Esther when his divorce is granted.

Ironically, the marriage does not provide Esther with security for her son or herself. The early influences at Woodview have left William an incurable better. He loses his money as well as his public house license. Then, consumption ravages him, and at his death, Esther is exactly where she was, and their son is no better off. Once more she must struggle heroically. At last she thinks of Mrs. Barfield, now

²⁹ Ibid., p. 136.

³⁰ Moore, Esther Waters, p. 236.

living alone in her neglected mansion, too poor to hire adequate help for its maintenance. Esther's return unites the two women, who have both experienced a great deal of trouble but who have endured it and achieved a ripe composure. The closing scene shows Esther proudly and happily presenting a handsome soldier--her son--to Mrs. Barfield.

Moore's novel invites comparison with other treatments of the fallen woman in earlier novels. Malcolm Brown has shown similarities to Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Moore himself, in A Communication to My Friends, prepared as an introduction to the uniform edition of his works (1933), tells how the idea of having a heroine like Esther grew out of Adam Bede. He says, "George Eliot sought a subject in Hetty Sorrel's murder of her child. A woman's moulding of the subject, a true moulding, would be Hetty living to save her child."³¹ Moore's Esther, however, is a different sort of person entirely, without Hetty's selfishness and vanity, someone quite capable of suffering for her child's sake. But was Moore unaware that Mrs. Gaskell had already treated the subject in Ruth? There are similarities between Mrs. Gaskell's story and Moore's, the most outstanding being the fact that both Ruth and Esther assume the responsibilities of bringing up their boys. Both have opportunities to marry, either the father or another man. In both cases the seducer suddenly reappears. Ruth does not marry Bellingham

³¹ Ibid., pp. xlv1-xlv11.

because she fears his influence over Leonard. Esther, less idealistic, chooses William over Fred because he seems to offer better security for the child's future. (It was Bellingham's argument, also, but Ruth weighed it against the other one of moral influence and found him wanting.) Moore's heroine, less idealistic, more practical, still makes the wrong choice, even after long hesitation.

Moore's story avoids sentimentality. It is reasonably frank, does not mince matters of seduction or childbirth. His greatest contribution lies in the realistic portrayal of a girl, religious at heart, thrust into a strange situation with which she is psychologically unable to cope, and then in a kind of dogged way trying ever after to make the best of things.

The rest of the novels to be examined in this chapter present a very different kind of fallen woman. Unlike Esther, who could not read when she went to Woodview, these girls are influenced by advanced thought, whether in the religious, social, or political spheres. In several cases the subject of their rebellion is coupled with another theme; for example, two of the novels also deal with the unhappy marriage problem.

One of the earliest of such novels was written by a woman who was unknown to English readers, but whose emancipated heroine created a sensation. It is The Story of an African Farm (1883) by Olive Schreiner, whose publishers, Chapman and Hall, asked her to add a few lines which would indicate that

Lyndall had been secretly married to the father of her child. This, Mrs. Schreiner refused to do, insisting that it would spoil the artistic integrity of her book.³²

Her strange novel which, according to Cornelius Weygandt, "fluttered the doves of the eighteen-eighties,"³³ is an exposition of religious ideas as well as a challenge to conventional beliefs about the role of woman. Disillusionment with Christianity, and the search for another answer to man's questions about his destiny are presented through Lyndall and the dreamer, Waldo. Lyndall challenges also the old attitudes towards women.

These two, with a third child, Lyndall's cousin Em, grow up together on the South African veld. When she is twelve, Lyndall announces one day:

There is nothing helps in this world, . . . but to be very wise, and to know everything--to be clever. . . . When I am grown up, . . . I shall wear not only for best, but every day, a pure white silk, and little rose-buds, like the lady in Tant' Sannie's bed-room, and my petticoats will be embroidered, not only at the bottom, but all through.³⁴

The girl's actions reveal a proud, independent spirit: she disdains the sadistic fraud who calls himself Napoleon

³² Vera Buchanan-Gould, Not without Honour: The Life and Writings of Olive Schreiner (London: Hutchinson, 1949), p. 67.

³³ A Century of the English Novel (New York: The Century Co., 1925), p. 305.

³⁴ Ralph Iron [Olive Schreiner], The Story of an African Farm (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1889), pp. 11-12.

Blenkins; she resigns herself to punishment by telling her cousin that tears never do any good; she defies the adults and goes to comfort Waldo whom Jenkins has beaten.

After her return from the distant boarding school where she has spent four years, Lyndall confesses to Waldo that she has learned only unhappy things. Girls' schools, she has discovered, encourage folly and crush the spirit of a woman. She resisted their influence, read what she pleased, wrote, traveled and made acquaintances, but not with her fellow students.

In many impassioned speeches, Lyndall confides her thoughts to Waldo: she has observed that women are molded to the desires of men, who do not value their knowledge, wisdom, or love, and do not want them to become doctors, or lawyers, or leaders. When Waldo encourages her to communicate her ideas to the world, she says strangely that she must remain asleep until someone comes to wake her. To Em, who is engaged, she says bluntly, "I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man's foot; and I do not so greatly admire the crying of babies."³⁵

Em's fiance, Gregory Rose, is infatuated by Lyndall's indifference to him. She senses that he wants evidence of his power over her. When he says he will serve her and ask nothing in return, she considers him a fool. Inconsistently, after a

³⁵ Ibid., p. 145.

Boer wedding, she consents to let him drive her home. Shortly afterwards she asks him to give her his name, reminding him of his promise. Before they can be married, however, an elegant stranger, evidently known to Lyndall, arrives and asks her what she means by marrying a man whom she describes as a fool. Why will she not marry him? Her answer is:

You call into activity one part of my nature; there is a higher part that you know nothing of, that you never touch. If I married you, afterward it would arise and assert itself, and I should hate you always, as I do now sometimes.³⁶

Her next objection is the same one she had to Gregory, but which she deliberately seemed to overlook when she asked him to marry her:

I have seen enough to tell me that you love me because you cannot bear to be resisted, and want to master me. You liked me at first because I treated you and all men with indifference. You resolved to have me because I seemed unattainable. That is all your love means.³⁷

Her solution is a startling one: she will go away with him early the next morning, to Transvaal, but not as his wife. "I cannot marry you because I cannot be tied; but, if you wish, you may take me away with you, and take care of me; then when we do not love any more, we can say good-bye."³⁸

The reader learns later that for a time Lyndall and her stranger traveled together, that eventually he left her at an

³⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 198.

inn-upon her insistence--and that there she gave birth to a child who lived only three hours, that when the stranger wrote, asking permission to return and cherish her as his wife, the letter reached a dying girl who was nevertheless adamant in refusing to let him come.

In this novel, Lyndall and Waldo are powerfully drawn, almost Bronte-esque figures, moving in the primeval mysteries of the African veld. None of the trappings of seduction stories are found here: betrayal, illicit passion, poverty, cruelty, and shame. There is one matter, however, about which Olive Schreiner is as reticent as many of her fellow-novelists had been, that of Lyndall's motivation. Was it unguarded passion that led into the relationship with the stranger, or was it part of a calculated rebellion against accepted mores?

Whatever it was, Lyndall is protesting against much more than man's traditional estimation of women when she brings an illegitimate child into the world. She is at odds with herself when she dreams of a soul-mate, even while believing that such a union is unattainable. And while she has sloughed off traditional moral and religious beliefs, she has found no satisfactory replacements. In the end, her death is not a concession to Victorian convention, but like Waldo's, the fate of human beings too sensitive to live in an incomprehensible world.

Mrs. Schreiner, like a number of her contemporaries,

chose the novel form to present an extended argument on social and religious questions. In this argument, the situation of an unwed mother, although presented without the sensational fanfare which readers might have expected, is invested with a certain mystery that belongs to the entire book as well. One hesitates to accuse the writer of introducing a titillating subject in order to make her argument palatable.

In a novel that appeared four years later, another author's purpose is to defend traditional belief and practice. William Barry's heroine in The New Antigone (1887) is Hippolyta Valence, daughter of Colonel Valence, Nihilist, Socialist, Iconoclast, Liberal--all the terms are applied to him. A singular beauty, Hippolyta has been trained by her father in revolutionary doctrines, but these teachings have not effaced her charm and delicacy.

When she and the artist, Rupert Glanville, reveal their love for one another, Hippolyta refuses to undergo a civil or religious marriage ceremony. As a Liberal, she holds that free love, or free marriage, as she calls it, must follow from the principles of liberty and equality. Every man and woman must determine for himself "the manner, the length, and the terms of union,"³⁹ she says. Glanville, although by no means conventionally religious, is dismayed by her attitude and begs her

³⁹ William Barry, The New Antigone (London: Macmillan and Company, 1892), p. 376.

to consider the dangers involved.

Her enthusiasm cannot be dampened. She speaks glowingly:

Let the soul of the artist within you burst these conventions, and float with me into happier air. The old world is dying; it is nearly dead. Cannot you hear the rattle in its throat; these inarticulate gaspings of rites and ceremonies, the meaning of which was emptied away before you and I saw the light? We are young; we have learnt how much of what people say they believe, and only say it, is false to the heart's core. What concern have we with effete aristocracies, obsolete religions, childish betrothals with ring and book in the sight of the profane multitudes? The infinite expanse of the future lies before us, the possibilities of tomorrow.⁴⁰

She goes on to argue that were she to ask sanction of priest or registrar upon her marriage, she would be degrading herself. In the liberal cause, men renounce honor, wealth, and power; women renounce respectability, as the old world views it.

The scene in which Hippolyta presents herself in Glanville's rooms and tries to persuade him that she must live with him as his wife, without a formal ceremony of any kind, is an astonishing reversal of thousands of other seduction scenes in fiction. Now it is the man who is distressed to the point of tears. In spite of her eloquence, he answers, "I cannot, I will not dishonour you."⁴¹

Her next move is another reversal of convention. She

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 289-290.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 291.

delivers an ultimatum. If he will not take her on her terms, he has seen the last of her. Having staked all, she will drown herself in the river. He asks for time to reflect, and leaves the house, to spend the night hours roaming about in great distraction, reviewing the dilemma in which he has been caught. His love for the girl is so great that he cannot give her up, but neither will he be the instrument of her ruin--which he is sure must follow. At last he wanders near the Thames, where his disordered mind imagines that he sees Hippolyta drawn from the water. It is too much. He goes back and agrees to her terms.

For nine months they are deliriously happy. Hippolyta has no regrets about her conduct, even if she admits that to speak so plainly cost her a great deal, for she is not a bold woman. Their union is spiritually as well as physically a harmonious one. The rupture, when it comes, does not grow out of misunderstanding or because they are tired of each other or because Society criticizes their alliance. It grows out of Hippolyta's discovery of what the abuse of their program may lead to.

Since Glanville's commitments require that he work away from home for extended periods. Hippolyta keeps herself occupied in charity work. In the slums she sees the mockery of "love" affairs that degrade a woman and brutalize the man. Ironically, it is Hippolyta who must inform a girl's parents

that their daughter is pregnant by a libertine who has enrolled under the Liberal banner. Contact with reality dims her enthusiasm.

One night, lonely and discouraged, Hippolyta attends a service in the church near her home. The priest's text is "The wages of sin is death," and when the sermon is finished, her illusions are gone. What she had worshipped in ignorance was not good, but evil. Acting impulsively, Hippolyta enters the confessional and asks what she must do to repair her sin. The answer is that she must repent, like Magdalene, and live for Christ.

At home, during the night, she struggles to see her conduct honestly, and discovers that man needs more than his instincts to guide him. She stands condemned for having been self-confident, for having persuaded Glanville to that which he believed to be wrong. Before a crucifix she prays to Christ to have pity on her.

When Glanville returns home the next day, she is gone. He searches for her in vain, at first unable to believe what the evidence tells him. Then he succumbs to that Victorian favorite, brain fever, and after his recovery, many months later, marries a noble lady. On their honeymoon trip in another land, he discovers a nun, to whom others refer as "the fallen woman," to be his lost Hippolyta, who has entered upon a life of expiation for her sin. She has moved from rebel to saint as

renunciation and penance follow her sin.

The novel is obviously a reaction to the stories about the emancipated woman. Canon Barry saw grave dangers threatening society from the propaganda of various writers and made his story a plea for traditional religion and morality. The woman and her lover are not vilified, but the characters are overdrawn, the scenes frequently melodramatic. Some of the time-honored clichés of seduction stories are interestingly reversed.

This emphasis on traditional morality, however, was by this time out of style. Mary Augusta Ward's The History of David Grieve (1892) provides a treatment more typical of the times than that in The New Antigone. Into this story, which traces the degrees by which a young man loses one kind of faith and painfully arrives at another, Mrs. Ward weaves an account of his union libre in Paris with the artist, Elise Delaunay. The novel illustrates how widely an author in the 1890's might depart from what had at one time been standard portrayal of such affairs.

One night, returning to the building in which she has her studio, Elise stumbles upon an English brother and sister who have just arrived from Manchester for a brief visit to Paris. Poised and sophisticated, scornful of what she calls bourgeois morality, Elise casts a spell over the handsome, sensitive youth, David Grieve, who sees in her the embodiment

of his dreams about Paris. She is dedicated to her art, determined to become famous, and even now awaiting in great anxiety the results of the Salon judging. Partly to pass the time, she entertains herself with young Grieve by discussing art with him and guiding him through the Paris museums after she has arranged for someone else to amuse his sister.

Thanks to her absorption of the ways of the artist class, Elise's ideas of the relations between men and women are all of a liberal kind. "She judged for herself; she had read for herself, observed for herself. Such a temper had hitherto preserved her from adventures; but, upon occasion, it might as easily land her in one."⁴²

The young man, who grew up in Dissenting circles in Derbyshire, gasps at the freedom of thought and conduct in Paris. He hears Elise declare:

I told you last night that I had no scruples. You thought it was a woman's exaggeration; it was the literal truth! If a man drinks, or is vicious, so long as he doesn't hurl the furniture at my head, or behave offensively to me, what does it matter to me! If he drinks so that he can't paint, and he wants to paint, well!--then he seems to me another instance of the charming way in which a kind Providence has arranged this world. . . . If I could give the poor devil a hand out of the mud, I would; if not, well, then, no sermons. I take him as I find him; if he annoys me, I call the police. But as to hiding my head and canting, not at all! That is your English way--it is the way of our bourgeoisie. It is not mine. I don't belong to the respectables--I would sooner kill myself a dozen times over. I can't breathe in their company. I

⁴² Mary Augusta Ward, The History of David Grieve (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1906), p. 310.

know how to protect myself; none of the men I meet dare to insult me; that is my idiosyncrasy--everyone has his own.⁴³

David cannot comprehend the ambition that burns within the girl and is only bewildered by all her excited talk about achieving fame with her painting. In love with her by this time, he simply praises her art when she falls into one of her doubting moods and provides the kind of confidence she needs to restore her spirits. As their relationship continues, however, she feels that it may interfere with her ambitions and decides to break it off. His grief at her decision is so great that when she gets the coveted mention at the Salon, he cannot even congratulate her. In an impassioned speech he declares that he was ready to give up his country for her, to be her slave, to protect her. Now he concludes by cursing the art that separates them.

In the end, she is sufficiently moved to ask whether he would be content to let her art come first. When he agrees, they find a tiny house near Fontainebleau and for a short time are idyllically happy. Then comes the day when she finds herself unable to paint as she wishes. Frustrated in her keenest desires, she longs to be back in Paris at the atelier where her teacher could advise her. When she reads a newspaper article praising her rival, but neglecting to mention her, she blames her relationship with David, saying that when she is

⁴³

Ibid., pp. 286-287.

with him she must be a woman. "You agitate me, you divide my mind, and my force goes. There are both capacities in me, and one destroys the other. And I want--I want my art!"⁴⁴ she exclaims.

Almost immediately afterwards, in one of those curious reversals of conventional treatment that authors employed in the '90's, Mrs. Ward shows David Grieve discovering that Elise has left him. His agony, too, rivals that of any deserted woman in fiction, and he also contemplates suicide.

Because the novel is David's story, Mrs. Ward does not pursue Elise's career, except to indicate that she, rather inexplicably, marries her cousin, an action hard to reconcile with her passionate declarations to David.

As far as Mrs. Ward depicts the struggle in Elise De-launay, it lies in the conflict between the demands of love and art, not between vice and virtue, or the demands of decorum over against those of passion. Elise's decision to leave David has nothing to do with penitence or revulsion, either.

The interlude with Elise left a mark upon David Grieve. But Mrs. Ward demonstrates that in this case the consequences of his deed are not necessarily evil. Ultimately they enrich his appreciation for the married state and lead him to an understanding of it that few men acquire. With his loss of faith in traditional Christianity, Grieve loses also the traditional

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 354.

reasons for marriage. His new understanding he confides to his wife Lucy, years after the events of that Paris summer:

I have come to think the most disappointing and hopeless marriage, nobly borne, to be better worth having than what people call an "ideal passion," if the ideal passion must be enjoyed at the expense of one of those fundamental rules which poor human nature has worked out, with such infinite difficulty and pain, for the protection and help of its own weakness. I did not know it,--but, so far as in me lay, I was betraying and injuring that society which has given me all I have.⁴⁵

It is a vindication of marriage over against the free love with which he and Elise experimented in Paris. Although she does not express it when they meet again, unexpectedly, Elise gives David some reason to believe that his conviction has become hers as well. She tells him that she has not painted a picture for years, that she does hack work to support herself and her invalid husband. When he asks her whether she is not unhappy, she says that she finds consolation in serving her husband.

Mrs. Ward's novel, while it becomes a defense of conventional marriage practices, on unconventional grounds, does not indict Elise Delaunay for her breach of conduct. If there is any condemnation, it is on the score of her seemingly heartless desertion of David Grieve.

A study of lost faith and emancipated conduct that ended finally in a desperate return to conventional practice came from the pen of Thomas Hardy in 1895. To his category of

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 526.

victims like Fanny Robin, Lucetta Le Sueur, and Tess Durbeyfield, he added Sue Bridehead, who is both protagonist and victim, and Arabella Donn, who is the former. They are his last examples; after Jude the Obscure, which was widely attacked, Hardy published no more fiction. Reasons for the criticisms may be apparent from a synopsis of the story.⁴⁶

Jude Fawley, an orphan boy with ambitions to become a college graduate, has made some progress towards realizing his goal when he is trapped into marriage by Arabella Donn, a sensual and somewhat coarse young girl. Since he must now support a wife, this ends his preparation for college. However, Arabella soon has enough of Jude and emigrates to Australia, where she marries someone else, although not divorced from Jude. In the meantime, Jude has met his cousin, Sue Bridehead, and realizing that he loves this highly intelligent, "emancipated" young woman, seeks occasions to meet her, withholding the information that he is already married. When she learns

⁴⁶ In the Preface to the 1912 edition of Jude the Obscure (London: Macmillan and Company), Hardy commented on the adverse reception accorded his book sixteen years earlier: "In my own eyes the sad feature of the attack was that the greater part of the story--that which presented the shattered ideals of the two chief characters, and had been more especially, and indeed almost exclusively, the part of interest to myself--was practically ignored by the adverse press of the two countries; the while that some twenty or thirty pages of sorry detail deemed necessary to complete the narrative, and show the antitheses in Jude's life, were almost the sole portions read and regarded." pp. viii-ix.

this, she chides him for not having told her at once and soon thereafter announces that she is going to marry Jude's former teacher, Richard Phillotson. In the week following Sue's marriage, Jude again meets Arabella, who is now a barmaid in a nearby tavern. The two spend the night together in another town, then go their own ways. Less than two months after Sue's marriage, when Sue and Jude return to his birthplace to attend the funeral of their aunt, she confesses to him that while Phillotson is a good, kind husband, sexual intercourse is distasteful, even repugnant to her. Eventually she persuades the long-suffering Phillotson to let her go live with Jude. (Her departure, and Phillotson's admission that he encouraged it, cost Phillotson his teaching position.)

While she claims to love Jude, Sue insists that they abstain from husband and wife relations, even after both have been divorced from their partners. Moreover, she finds reasons to postpone their legal marriage as often as they make plans for it. One day Arabella reappears, to ask Jude for financial help. To keep him from going after her, Sue finally agrees to give herself to Jude. Shortly thereafter Arabella tells Jude that their son, of whose existence he is unaware because he was born in Australia, is coming to England and asks him to care for the child. When she sees him, Sue determines to be a mother to the sad-faced, preternaturally old little boy. About the time

Sue has a child of her own, the criticism of neighbors makes it necessary for them to move. From then on, their history becomes one of Jude's illnesses and of their moving about. Sue has had two children and expects a third when Arabella's boy, discouraged by their troubles, kills the two smaller children and himself. Shattered by the event, Sue gives birth to a stillborn child, then begins to talk about sin and renunciation, and finally decides she is still Phillotson's wife and must be remarried to him, although she shrinks as much as ever from his embrace. Arabella, who has been widowed, finds Jude and marries him again. Already ill, he dies not many months later, but not before Arabella has already decided who her next husband will be.

While the novel is in many ways the tragedy of a young man who is defeated in his efforts to get a liberal education, it is also in large measure the story of a young woman in conflict with traditional mores and conventions. In Hardy's story, the young man who admires the scholars and longs to join the ranks of the educated finds his life interwoven with that of a young woman who is so "advanced" that she criticizes the medievalism of Christminster University and says that its professors are out of touch with their times. She has read not only the Greek and Latin classics, and Shakespeare, but also a good many authors not considered "family" or "feminine" reading in Victorian times: Boccaccio, Defoe, Fielding, Sterne,

and Smollett. She has learned to minimize the influence and importance of Jerusalem as contrasted with Athens and Rome; she says the cathedral is exhausted as a centre of life. Moreover, she offers to edit Jude's New Testament and ridicules the traditional interpretation of the Song of Solomon.

Sue's "emancipated" thinking has been coupled with some highly unusual conduct. Previous to her acquaintance with Jude she has had what the average observer would describe as an "affair" with a Christminster undergraduate whose quarters she shared for fifteen months, but whose mistress she refused to become.

When this young woman finds the physical aspect of marriage distasteful, it is not strange that she should marshal some rather advanced arguments against the continuation of their union. "'For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery"' she exclaims and argues "'we made the compact, and surely we can cancel it--not legally, of course; but we can morally."'⁴⁷ Putting her theory into practice, she leaves Phillotson to move in with Jude, assuming somewhat unrealistically that it will be on the same terms as her residence with the undergraduate. Two factors with which she has not reckoned, Jude's sensuality and her own jealousy of Arabella, force Sue finally to consummate their alliance.

⁴⁷ Hardy, Jude the Obscure, p. 268.

While Sue's reasoning and conduct sometimes seem contradictory enough to the reader, Hardy's reticence makes it even more difficult to understand her. For example, Sue does not want marriage with Jude for a reason that Hardy makes more clear in a letter to one of his friends than he does in the book. On November 10, 1895, he wrote:

You are quite right; there is nothing perverted or depraved in Sue's nature. The abnormalism consists in disproportion, not in inversion, her sexual instinct being healthy as far as it goes, but unusually weak and fastidious. Her sensibilities remain painfully alert notwithstanding, as they do in nature with such women. One point illustrating this I could not dwell upon: that though she has children, her intimacies with Jude have never been more than occasional, even when they were living together (I mention that they occupy separate rooms except towards the end), and one of her reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it; though while uncontracted she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses. This has tended to keep his passion as hot at the end as at the beginning, and helps to break his heart. He has never really possessed her as fully as he desired.⁴⁸

Condemned by churchwardens and lodging house keepers for her irregular alliance, Sue is actually far removed from the woman of promiscuous conduct they assume her to be. And what seems evident also is that at least a part of her "advanced" thought serves as an excuse to cover her own distaste for the sex act.

Hardy's novel, then, does what no English novelist had

⁴⁸ Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 42.

done, examines the tensions in a woman's sexual life and relates them to the questions of marriage and divorce and standards of conduct. His protagonist, Sue Bridehead, resists easy classification. In some ways she is an innocent, like Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth, naively unaware of the passions she arouses. In another way, she is as matter-of-fact as Rhoda Somerset, when she declares to Jude:

Well, . . . you've owned that it would probably end in misery for us. And I am not so exceptional a woman as you think. Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer, and the social advantages it gives them sometimes-- a dignity and an advantage that I am quite willing to do without.⁴⁹

She is capable, too, of acting from motives of jealousy, when she fears Arabella's influence over Jude. At the same time, she can get some perspective on her own conduct, for she confesses:

sometimes a woman's love of being loved gets the better of her conscience, and though she is agonized at the thought of treating a man cruelly, she encourages him to love her while she doesn't love him at all. Then when she sees him suffering, her remorse sets in, and she does what she can to repair the wrong.⁵⁰

In the end, the key to Sue's tragedy probably lies in those words, which offer not only an explanation of her conduct, but also foreshadow the time when her uncertain equilibrium cannot withstand the forces that life brings to bear upon it,

⁴⁹ Hardy, Jude the Obscure, p. 313.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 290.

and in an orgy of self-punishment she seeks to atone for what she now believes to have been her sin. Then she joins the ranks of fallen sisterhood in what will apparently be a lifelong penance for that transgression.

But while Hardy's fallen woman arrives finally at the same place where so many others had been brought by their creators, she has not been over-simplified as a pathetic figure or as a militant crusader for woman's rights. Of Hardy's achievement, Albert J. Guerard has written:

The great exception to the general failure in sexual psychology is the portrait of Sue Bridehead, which remains one of the most impressive in all fiction of a neurotic and sexually maladjusted woman--a living portrait rather than a case study, but with a case study's minute responsibility.⁵¹

There is, of course, the other fallen woman in the story, a marked contrast to Sue. Unashamedly sensual, un-plagued by feelings of guilt, not unlikeable, Arabella Donn, the other woman in Jude's life, seduces Jude, commits bigamy, gets him back, and at the end, leaves his dead body unattended so that she may have an afternoon outing with another man. Resourceful, and good-humored, she belongs to the class of Chaucer's Wife of Bath and Hardy's earlier character, Suke Damson, who accept their instincts in a common-sense way, whose mental and emotional states offer no complicated ravel for the psychologist-novelist to untangle. She lacks Sue's

⁵¹ Guerard, p. 109.

fineness, her intelligence, and her scruples, but she escapes ignominy and self-torture because of it.

Another late novel and its sequel also explore a woman's sense of guilt. In George Moore's story of a Catholic girl's conflict between the demands of passion and faith (Evelyn Innes, 1898), the heroine is no conventional fallen woman. Scorn, abandonment, degradation, remorse--none of these overtake her. In the end, she gives up her lovers because the teaching of her religion has been too strong, and she is unable to obliterate the sense of sin that oppresses her.

Evelyn Innes is the daughter of musicians. From her mother, now dead, she inherited a fine voice, but it had not been well-trained. One night Evelyn sings two songs at one of her father's concerts and is heard by Sir Owen Asher, stylish, somewhat Bohemian, new owner of the Wagnerian Review. He tells her afterwards that she must study with Madame Savelli in Paris, something her father's finances do not permit.

Sir Owen finds excuses to come again and again; she knows that he is seeking a new romance to help him forget a former intrigue. He realizes that there are obstacles to an affair with Evelyn: her love for her father, her duty towards him, and her piety. One day he offers to pay for her voice training abroad. She recognizes the temptation.

The modern agnostic, Asher, contemplates matters religious and moral, wondering what the outcome of an affair would

be--for her--and for him:

That God should concern himself at all in our affairs was strange enough. That he should do so seemed creditable to him, but that he should manage us to the extent of the mere registration of cohabitation in the parish books was--. Owen flung out his arms in an admirable gesture of despair, and crossed the room.⁵²

The struggle for both is a long one. Asher persuades himself that he is concerned with real morality, not with conventional ideas of it. If Evelyn remains with her father, she will hate him some day. If she goes away with Asher, he will make a great artist of her. In five or six years, when she has become famous, he will make her Lady Asher. To his proposals, Evelyn answers, "All my people were good people--my mother, my grandmother, my aunts. I never had a relative against whom anything could be said, so I don't know why I am what I am."⁵³

She omits her evening prayers. "She could not kneel by her bedside and pray to God to deliver her from evil, all the while nourishing in her heart the intention of abandoning herself to the thought of Owen the moment she got into bed."⁵⁴

She goes to Paris with Sir Owen, who buys her exquisite clothes, takes her to the races, and introduces her to the famous teacher, Madame Savelli. In six years' time she is a

⁵²George Moore, Evelyn Innes (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), pp. 66-67.

⁵³Ibid., p. 76.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 83.

leading Wagnerian soprano. There are ruptures and reconciliations with Owen, and she acquires an additional lover, Ulick Dean. One day she finds herself lying to Owen and sees the consequences of her conduct as endless uncertainty, insomnia, torments of conscience and of desire, evoked by the songs she sings, and the temptation to commit suicide.

At last she goes to confession, where she feels that grace is given her. Then she writes to both Owen and Ulick, explaining that she is giving up her opera career. Just before she is to sing Kundry, Evelyn Innes renounces passion, luxury, and fame.

Although the book ends there, it is not the end of Evelyn's story. In the Preface to Sister Teresa (1901), Moore explains that for Evelyn Innes he compiled so much manuscript that the publishers and he decided to issue the work in two volumes, under separate titles. The sequel begins with the climactic incident in Evelyn's struggle against sexual desire, the temptation she is miraculously enabled to overcome when she hears the voices of nuns--there actually are none--singing the Veni Creator.

Over the protests of her lovers and friends, Evelyn decides to enter a convent, where she hopes to escape the continual struggle. Before taking the veil, she confesses to the Prioress that she "always felt it to be wrong to live with a man who was not your husband" and as long as she would not

give up Owen Asher, she had to deny God. For her it became a choice between faith and passion, but the former triumphed. As she says, "I cannot live without faith, without authority, without guidance. I am weak, I require authority."⁵⁵ Experience has taught her that outside the convent, her faith may falter.

In the convent, Evelyn, now Sister Teresa, continues to be troubled by desire. Even there she prays to God that he will give her peace.

She hoped He would not allow her to be tempted again by the flesh; that He would take out of her mind all thoughts of the men she had known and of the men she had sinned with.

The sin of fornication--that terrible sin--had always been her trouble, and in the years she would have to live in the convent now, doing nothing, having accomplished His work, she prayed that He would take pity on her, and never allow her to be tempted again.⁵⁶

Thus, it is George Moore, at the end of the nineteenth century, who offers the study of a struggle that had been ignored or, at best, barely hinted at, in all preceding English novels on the subject. His Evelyn Innes examines the conflict produced by the demands of the flesh and of the spirit in the life of a girl with strong inclinations toward both.

In 1898, thanks to his own efforts as well as those of Meredith, Gissing, Hardy, and others, George Moore was able to treat frankly such a subject as his heroine's sensuality and

⁵⁵ George Moore, Sister Teresa (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), p. 133.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 188.

the motivation leading up to her surrender to Asher. His descriptions of love scenes are daring, not by comparison with mid-twentieth-century standards, but by comparison with those of his predecessors and contemporaries in the nineteenth.

Evelyn's struggle is all the more real because Moore dares to show the pleasures of sex, as well as his heroine's self-accusations afterwards.⁵⁷ Even the matter of birth control comes up for discussion when Evelyn confesses her past life to the priest and admits that she and Asher have practiced birth control to avoid the embarrassment and inconvenience of a child.

Since Moore can concentrate on the psychology of sex, he can avoid the themes which other novelists substituted; the scorn of the world, melodramatic comings and goings, desertion, ruin, exile, and death. His heroine's situation, in fact, is an unusual one. She is acclaimed everywhere; the great people of the land are her friends. Her father, whom she injured by going away, forgives her and attends a concert. Asher is eager to marry her, as is Ulick Dean. Repentance does not follow desertion or degradation because Evelyn experiences neither.

As Moore himself recognized, the novel is too heavily freighted with descriptions of art and music and with philosophic

⁵⁷The following passage illustrates Moore's treatment: "Her door was ajar; he pushed it open and then stopped for a moment, surprised at his own good fortune. And he never forgot that instant's impression of her body's beauty. But before he could snatch the long gauze wrapper from her, she had slipped her arms through the sleeves, and, joyous as a sunlit morning hour, she came forward and threw herself into his arms." Evelyn Innes, p. 147.

discussions, but the portrait of Evelyn Innes is an achievement. Margaret Maison describes it as "one of the most deeply sensitive and analytical studies of a Catholic heroine torn by a passion-and-faith conflict."⁵⁸ And writing particularly of Sister Teresa, Malcolm Brown speaks of

Evelyn Innes' perfectly equilibrated dilemmas, her elaborate self-deceptions, ironically repeated, her pointless achievements, and her slow lapse into quietly resigned defeat--all lucidly seen, perfectly understood, and depicted with new-found stylistic skill and force.⁵⁹

It is interesting that at the end of the century, when Meredith, Gissing, and Hardy had issued manifestos opposed to the traditional evaluations of immoral conduct, Moore should have presented a convincing heroine who examines her conduct by time-honored Christian standards of right and wrong.

Defiance of these standards ends happily, however, for a pair of lovers in George Meredith's Lord Ormont and His Aminta (1894).

When Matthew Weyburn arrives to become secretary to Lord Ormont, he discovers to his great surprise that the woman who is introduced as Lady Ormont is Aminta Farrell, with whom he had been in love as a schoolboy and who had offered some indication that his feelings were returned. At that time a bond that drew them together was their common admiration of an English

⁵⁸ Margaret Maison, The Victorian Vision: Studies in the Religious Novel (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), p. 160.

⁵⁹ Brown, p. 145.

cavalry officer in India.

Now, years later, Aminta is the languid, reserved wife of that same general, Lord Ormont, since retired from military service. She registers contempt when she learns that Weyburn plans to become a schoolmaster. The reason, which Weyburn, of course, does not know, is that Aminta has become disillusioned in her marriage and as an antidote she has been idealizing the figure from her schoolday romance, Weyburn himself. His announcement that he will not seek a military career shatters the splendid memory that had sustained her.

There is little reason to believe, as Lionel Stevenson has suggested, that the marriage was incompatible because of the difference in their ages.⁶⁰ From the account supplied by Aminta's garrulous aunt, Weyburn learns that the two met on ship-board, where the girl's unaffected hero-worship won the heart of the former general; their marriage in Madrid had been followed by a period of intense happiness. However, Lord Ormont had never presented her as his wife, either to his family or to society, their relationship consequently remaining so ambiguous that seven years later his sister, Lady Charlotte, still refuses to believe that they are married.

This delay, as well as his refusal to move into the

⁶⁰ Lionel Stevenson, The Ordeal of George Meredith: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 312.

Ormont ancestral home, Steignton, is galling to Aminta. She is tired of traveling on the continent and wishes to settle in England. As time goes on, she becomes aware that there is something dishonoring in her status as unacknowledged wife whose companions must be people on the fringes of society. One of them, a wealthy philanderer, writes her passionate love letters which she rereads, not because she has any feeling for him, but because they convince her that she is loved by someone.

Meredith makes it clear that Ormont does love his wife, but suggests subtly that he does not understand she is an individual who wants to be treated as such and not as a possession. Here, Aminta's friend, Mrs. Lawrence, represents the less sensitive woman, of whom Meredith writes disparagingly that her

boy's head held boy's brains; and Lord Ormont's praise of the splendid creature's nerve when she had to smell powder in Spain, and at bull-fights, and once at a wrecking of their carriage down a gully on the road over the Alpujarras, sent her away subdued, envious, happy to have kissed the cheek of the woman who could inspire it.⁶¹

The references to "splendid creature's nerve" and "smell powder" might as well have been spoken of Lord Ormont's horse.

To suggest Ormont's possessive attitude toward marriage, Bernard Brunner points out Meredith's use of sea imagery in these lines: "And somewhat so might a government cruiser observe the intrusion of a white-sailed yacht in protected sea-waters,

⁶¹ George Meredith, Lord Ormont and His Aminta (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1910), p. 112.

where licenced trawlers are at the haul." Brunner reminds us that Ormont is the "government cruiser," and the "protected waters," his marital domain.⁶²

Matthew Weyburn is not with Lord Ormont very long before he comes to the conclusion that although his employer is a man of the highest qualities, he is "without understanding of how to treat a woman, or belief in her having equal life with him on earth."⁶³

Another reason for the estrangement between husband and wife is to be found in Ormont's grudge against England. Once his country's military idol, he was not prepared for its criticism of his strategy in India, and now, in revenge, will not do English society the honor of asking it to accept his wife. Somewhat tardily, Aminta herself recognizes that she has become the victim of her husband's feud with his country.

During the period of her growing unhappiness, Aminta finds pleasure and relief in talking to her husband's secretary. He has progressive ideas about the education of both sexes, which he hopes one day to put into practice in a school of his own. Gradually certain incidents show Aminta that his ideal of becoming a schoolmaster is a worthy one. Her disillusionment with the husband who nurses a grudge because his land does not need his military services opens her eyes to the worth of a man

⁶² Bernard Brunner, "Meredith's Symbolism: Lord Ormont and His Aminta," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, VIII (September, 1953), p. 127.

⁶³ Meredith, Lord Ormont and His Aminta, p. 192.

who will serve his country--and the world--in a better capacity. In an effort to escape the present, Aminta dreams sometimes of a partnership in which she and Weyburn would teach boys and girls, keeping them together as much as possible to instil mutual understanding and appreciation such as her marriage was not affording.

Disillusionment with her husband extends also to the class to which he belongs and to which she had aspired. The Ormont jewels, which he gives her, represent generations of women's slavery. What finally precipitates her decision to leave Ormont is the news, lightly reported by her acquaintances, that Morsfield, author of the love letters she received, has been killed in a duel. She suspects that her husband is somehow behind the deed and is revolted that he and his class condone such bloodshed. She has only pity for the slain man, but "she knew hatred of her lord in his being suspected as instigator or accomplice of the hands that dealt the blow. He became to her thought a python whose coils were about her person, insufferable to the gaze backward."⁶⁴

Through twenty-six of the thirty chapters in his book, Meredith traces the forces that break up Aminta's marriage. In Chapter XXVII she engages in an unexpected swimming match with Weyburn, who has come to say goodbye. During that match they recall the names of their schooldays acquaintance, "Brownny," and

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 305.

"Matey." For her, his name embodies all that the marriage relationship with Lord Ormont lacked. She tells him that she has left her husband. He warns her to think of what that means, but when she insists that she is determined, he says that if she is free, he claims her.

That Weyburn realizes what may be in store for them is clear from the rather long speech that he makes in answer to her question about the fate of his school. It reveals also the changing attitudes that Meredith recognized in the 1890's. Weyburn says:

I shall not consider that we are malefactors. We have the world against us. It will not keep us from trying to serve it. And there are hints of humaner opinions:--it's not all a huge rolling block of a Juggernaut. Our case could be pleaded before it. I don't think the just would condemn us heavily. . . . With a world against us, our love and labour are constantly on trial: we must have great hearts; and if the world is hostile, we are not to blame it. In the nature of things, it could not be otherwise.⁶⁵

When Weyburn goes to Switzerland to open his school, Aminta is with him, not as his wife, but as an equal, giving and receiving love and respect. Years later, when their methods of education have proved notably successful, they welcome as one of their students, the grandnephew of Lord Ormont, sent there as evidence of Ormont's esteem and forgiveness.

The story, thus, has no fallen woman in the usual sense, nor does it have a villain. Meredith avoids standard characters and situations in his study of the failure of a marriage, and

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 332.

even discards that stock explanation for incompatibility, the great difference in the ages of the couple.

For intrigues, mysterious meetings, injured husband or wife, Meredith substitutes a careful investigation of the manner in which two people grow apart. The cause may be found partly in a man's inherited ideas regarding the role of women; it lies also in his pride and character. Even the woman has a share in the blame. She speaks of the "bitter ambition" that drove her on to the role of great lady. Both husband and wife, after the separation, recognize weaknesses in themselves, as well as fineness in the other.

Meredith's most radical departure from what had become standard treatment of the adulterous woman theme lies in the happy life together which he shows Aminta and Weyburn enjoying. Although an occasional writer permitted a prostitute to be rehabilitated, or a betrayed girl to regain respectability, no recognized novelist had presented a woman who broke her marriage vows as enjoying a happy life with another man. What Meredith thought about the world's standards of judgment which writers had had to consider is evident from a passage which appears early in the novel:

Aminta was born to prize rectitude, to walk on the traced line uprightly; and while the dark rose overflowed the soft brown of her cheeks, under musings upon her unlicensed heart's doings over-night, she not only pleaded for woeful creatures of her sex burdened as she and erring, she weighed them in the scales with men, and put her heart

where Justice pointed, sending men to kick aloft.⁶⁶

In a less tolerant time (1865), Meredith had come out with another kind of plea in Rhoda Fleming. There he wrote, "The young man who can look on them we call fallen women with a noble eye, is to my mind he that is most nobly begotten of the race, and likeliest to be the sire of a noble line."⁶⁷ In Lord Ormont and His Aminta he went even farther, to draw a sympathetic portrait of an adulterous woman.

Other novelists' pleas for a better understanding of woman's position are found in the last three books which remain to be discussed.

The folly of parents who insist on their daughters' making grand marriages and the lot of frustrated spinsters in Ireland provoked George Moore's 1884 problem novel, A Drama in Muslin.⁶⁸ Its theme is the same subject, then, that Jane Austen had treated in Pride and Prejudice. Here the setting is Ireland in the 1880's; the characters belong to the same upper class that Miss Austen describes; there is a sprinkling of titles.

From the beginning, May Gould is shown as a jaunty, horse-loving young woman with some ideas of her own about mar-

66

Ibid., pp. 94-95.

67

George Meredith, Rhoda Fleming (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1910), p. 317.

68

Moore subsequently shortened the title to Muslin.

riage. Among all the other girls and women who converse interminably about men and marriage, she stands out for insisting that she will not marry a man unless she loves him. Her mother, on the other hand, would prefer a girl to make a bad marriage rather than none at all.

During the Dublin season, when many mothers and their debutante daughters congregate in the Shelbourne Hotel for the festivities, the Goulds go, too, as do the Scullys, whose debt-ridden son Fred has been May's comrade in riding and hunting, although Mrs. Gould will not approve a marriage between them. When others warn May of Fred's unsavoury past, she accuses them of jealousy.

Moore, who was frequently in rebellion against restrictions regulating the presentation of certain subject matter, prepares readers adequately for May's subsequent confession to her friend Alice Barton that she is seven months' pregnant: he stresses May's unconventional behavior; he makes generous references to indiscreet, if not vulgar, conduct among the Irish upper classes (Mrs. Barton's friendship with Lord Dungary is described as twenty years of "elegant harlotry"); he lets Alice overhear a conversation between Fred and May in which that young "blood" asks her to let him come to her hotel room at night. Furthermore, May confides to Alice that Fred has gone to Australia, but that if he were to come back, she would not be interested in seeing him again.

A new twist in seduction stories appears when Alice, who earns money by writing for the papers, agrees to support Mary while she takes lodging in Dublin and awaits the birth of her child, away from her family and friends. From the city, May writes letters to Alice, a device which, skilfully used, might have permitted Moore to make a contribution to the studies of girls in that position. May's letters, however, simply record nostalgia for a happier past and present boredom.

The baby, she writes, died soon after birth. In due time, May herself returns to her unsuspecting mother and friends, in appearance none the worse for her confinement. With some of the money Alice sent her she has bought a stunning new outfit, evidence enough that she has regained her zest for life.

By the end of the book, when most of the girls in the story are becoming unresigned and bitter old maids, May Gould is impetuously training her horses, attending the meets, and confessing in a thoughtful moment to Alice that like every woman she wants a husband and a home. In the meantime, she has a lover, but she admits:

It is dreadfully sinful, and if I died I should go straight to hell. I know all that. I wish I was going to be married, like you! For then one is out of temptation. Haven't you a kind word for me? Won't you kiss me and tell me you don't despise me?⁶⁹

Alice doesn't condemn May. But while the author avoids

⁶⁹ George Moore, Muslin (London: William Heinemann, 1936), p. 262.

sentimentality and moralizing, he announces on the last page that May had to give up riding after being injured in a steeplechase accident. It comes as a surprise; one asks whether Moore has done anything to prepare for such an ending to May's independent conduct. If it occurred in a more conventional treatment of the subject, it would create no problem, for in such a treatment, punishment always came to the sinner. However, looking over the other novels in which Moore depicted fallen women (A Modern Lover, A Mummer's Wife, Esther Waters, Evelyn Innes-Sister Teresa), we notice that only in A Modern Lover do such characters escape suffering. Moore was in revolt against restrictions that limited the telling of the story; in his practice he suggests that he considered misery a natural result of immoral conduct although, as in Muslin, the cause and effect relationship is not always clear.

Another fallen woman who is used by her creator as a spokesman for his opposition to society's attitudes appears in Grant Allen's The Woman Who Did (1895). Like Hippolyta Valence in The New Antigone, she deliberately chooses to defy conventional practices for the sake of her principles.

At one of her garden parties, Mrs. Dewsbury introduces Alan Merrick, a rising young barrister, to a beautiful girl with the words, "He's one of your own kind, as dreadful as you are; very free and advanced; a perfect firebrand. In fact, my dear child, I don't know which of you makes my hair

stand on end most.'"⁷⁰ The girl is Herminia Barton, daughter of the Dean of Dulwich, a former Girton student, now a school-teacher and part-time journalist.

To Merrick she confides in her first speech that she had left the college without a degree because it offered only a pretense of educating women. "'The whole object of the training was to see just how far you could manage to push a woman's education without the faintest danger of her emancipation.'"⁷¹ By making herself independent of men for support, she can now live according to her principles and work for the moral and social deliverance of her sex.

Merrick is impressed by the girl's appearance and convictions. He notices that her face is

the face of a free woman. Something so frank and fearless shone in Herminia's glance, as her eye met his, that Alan, who respected human freedom above all other qualities in man or woman, was taken on the spot by its perfect air of untrammelled liberty. . . . A certain lofty serenity, not untouched with pathos, seemed to strike the keynote. But that was not all. Some hint of every element in the highest loveliness met in that face and form,--physical, intellectual, emotional, moral.⁷²

The courtship which follows is an unusual one for that time. Herminia makes no secret of her regard for him; he may visit her freely at the cottage where she lives alone; she goes frankly to search for him in the places where he is sketching.

⁷⁰ Grant Allen, The Woman Who Did (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926), p. 10.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 9-10.

In many ways they disregard the conventional code regulating the conduct of lovers of their class.

The author makes it clear, however, that Alan Merrick is not quite Herminia Barton's equal in perfection, although she imagined him so. Grant Allen enters the story himself to say, "Indeed, it adds, to my mind, to the tragedy of Herminia Barton's life that the man for whom she risked and lost everything was never quite worthy of her; and that Herminia to the end not once suspected it."⁷³ It is evident on the day he asks her to marry him, when Herminia blushes and protests, much as another woman might have done at the suggestion of an illicit union, and patiently explains what he ought to understand by now, that regular marriage is a form of slavery, an assertion of man's supremacy over woman, which she, in her role of emancipator, cannot subscribe to. It would be easy, she says,

to be false to my sex, a traitor to my convictions; to sell my kind for a mess of pottage, a name and a home, or even for thirty pieces of silver, to be some rich man's wife, as other women have sold it. But, Alan, I can't. My conscience won't let me. I know what marriage is, from what vile slavery it has sprung; on what unseen horrors for my sister women it is reared and buttresses; by what unholy sacrifices it is sustained and made possible.⁷⁴

Merrick is not easily persuaded. Less idealistic than Herminia, he anticipates what society will say about a union not legalized by religious ceremony, and he tries desperately to change her mind.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 30.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 41-42.

Herminia will not be dissuaded. She applies Lovelace's line to her case, "'I couldn't love you, Alan, quite so much, loved I not honor more, and the battle imposed upon me.'" ⁷⁵ When he tries as a last resort to put off making the decision, she replies in characteristic manner with a Bible quotation, "'Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.'" ⁷⁶ Her ultimatum follows: he must choose now to take her on her terms, or lose her. Merrick gives in.

Without any of the usual announcements or ceremonies, the two assume the roles of husband and wife as Herminia interprets them. They continue to live in separate houses; she teaches school as usual. Neighbors on her street find the comings and goings of Merrick most unusual, but Herminia is oblivious to their reactions. The author explains, "Too free from any taint of sin or shame herself ever to suspect that others could misinterpret her action," she could not imagine that her relationship with Merrick should stir gossip. "To the pure all things are pure; and Herminia was dowered with that perfect purity." ⁷⁷

Merrick, however, is not unaware of the talk they are creating. When Herminia becomes pregnant, he decides she must resign from her position before anyone asks questions. Reluctantly Herminia gives way because, as Allen points out, "The

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 78-79

man must needs retain for many years to come the personal hegemony he has usurped over the woman; and the woman who once accepts him as lover or husband must give way in the end, even in matters of principle, to his virile self-assertion."⁷⁸ In other ways, too, Merrick asserts himself. Herminia is dismayed to discover on their trip to Italy that he signs the hotel register as Mr. and Mrs. Alan Merrick.

In Perugia, Merrick contracts typhoid fever. His father, to whom Herminia wires the news, answers that he is on the way, but that they must be married at once. (He had previously indicated his complete lack of sympathy with their principles.) By the time he arrives, his son is dead and Herminia, who to the last refused to compromise her convictions, is not his legal widow and cannot inherit his estate, a fact which only briefly disturbs her. She accepts it as part of the price she must pay for her principles.

The child born to Herminia is a girl. While the mother must give up her role as emancipator, to raise the child, she looks forward to the time when her daughter will espouse the cause of woman's emancipation.

To Herminia's great disappointment, Dolores grows up accepting the conventional beliefs of others and showing no sympathy with her mother's ideals. The climax comes when she is courted by an eligible young man who is stunned to learn that her parents were not married. No less stunned by the discovery,

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 81-82.

Dolores upbraids her mother, and then goes to seek a home with her paternal grandfather.

It is too much for Herminia. To Dolores she writes a letter explaining that her goal has been to be a martyr for her principles. That her daughter should misunderstand her is the final pang. Once more she quotes Scripture: "'But I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is close at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith I started in life with. Nothing remains for me but the crown of martyrdom.'" ⁷⁹ To free Dolores from the reproach of having such a mother, she takes poison and dies. (Did her creator fail to see that by making it possible for Dolores to contract a conventional marriage, Herminia was compromising her principles?)

Where novelists like Mrs. Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, and Anthony Trollope were frankly concerned with the plight of fallen women, Grant Allen, we see, is not concerned in the first place with society's treatment of those who break its ordinances. He is critical first of all of the ordinances. This is clear throughout the book. The author is everywhere, sometimes using Herminia as his mouthpiece, sometimes speaking in his own voice. When, for example, Herminia must pass as a married woman if anyone is to take an interest in her child, he writes, "So wrapt in vile falsehoods and conventions are we. So far have we trav-

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 221.

elled from the pristine realities of truth and purity. We lie to our children--in the interests of morality."⁸⁰ It was Herminia Barton's role, he declares, to discover "how sad a fate it is to be born a civilized being in a barbaric society."⁸¹ Chapter XVII he devotes to a criticism of what he calls the monopolistic instincts which operate in patriotism, capitalism, and marriage. The protests Herminia utters, the principles she lives by, and the conventions she violates are determined by her creator's dissatisfactions with capitalist society and its institutions.

The attitudes of individuals toward those whom they regard as fallen women do not wholly escape censure. When Herminia meets her father, he insists that unless she repent, she must keep away from her "untainted sisters."⁸² Dr. Merriok is shown to be similarly bigoted. And even the London Bohemian element, among whom Herminia finds a few friends, are too convention-bound to "let their children ask after Miss Barton's baby."⁸³ (*Italics mine.*)

So eager is Allen to make his point that his heroine is a caricature, not a real woman at all. He insists upon her perfection, but the reader is likely to see her lacking in common sense. Her consistency is ridiculous, rather than admirable; her continual wrenching of Scripture for her purposes suggests

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 140.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 167.

⁸² Ibid., p. 149.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 140.

fanaticism. Worst of all is her utter confidence in her own ideas and the rightness of her cause. In spite of all the rebuffs she meets, she never doubts or wavers in her progress toward martyrdom. Reading her story, one almost longs for a return to the remorseful fallen woman of an earlier period.

Another novelist who uses his book as a vehicle for indicating his dissatisfaction with what he regards as sham morality and blind following of custom is William Hale White (Mark Rutherford). Set in the fen district and in London of 1844, Clara Hopgood (1896) is the story of two sisters who receive an unusual (for that day) bringing up. Their father belonged to no church but respected his wife's rather vague beliefs. While Clara goes to school in Weimar, Madge is in attendance briefly at a boarding school whose aggressively Low Church headmistress is so scandalized by the fact that Madge has not been baptized that she dismisses the girl. That opens the way for Madge to go to Weimar also, where she is introduced to German classics and operas and discusses the Leben Jesu. Upon their return to Fenmarket, the girls find its climate stifling.

The action begins with the arrival in Fenmarket of Frank Palmer, a hearty, affectionate sort of young man who has accepted without question the religious and political beliefs of his father, an acquaintance of the late Mr. Hopgood. Frank's first visits to Mrs. Hopgood and her daughters are spent in somewhat artificial discussions about right conduct, a subject to which

Frank can bring only borrowed ideas. Madge says she is willing to dispense with fixed standards in favor of following good impulses. "'Do what you feel to be right, and let the rule go hang. Somebody, cleverer in logic than we are, will come along afterwards and find a higher rule which we have obeyed, and will formulate it concisely.'"⁸⁴

To this girl, Frank feels himself drawn, and after a short time, they are engaged. The impulsive Madge, while physically attracted to Frank, sometimes doubts that her feeling has the right kind of basis. He is troubled less by fine distinctions between physical and spiritual love, but Madge is aware that there is not always complete harmony between them.

One day, thinking to please Madge, Frank memorizes Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" and recites it for her on the eve of his departure for Germany. To his disappointment (and sounding like William Hale White rather than the girl who admires Tennyson's "Oenone") Madge criticizes the poem for its "cloudy Wordsworthian," phrases.⁸⁵ Then, realizing that his efforts to please her deserve more than that, she affirms that it is a lovely poem after all, a statement that represents the triumph of

⁸⁴ William Hale White, Clara Hopgood (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), p. 58.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

her feeling for Frank over her judgment.

That something more happens is clear from an exchange of letters between them: his implore forgiveness and her consent to a speedy marriage; hers declare that she does not love him and will not marry him. She has had a sudden revelation of the truth and writes:

Whatever wrong may have been done, marriage to avoid disgrace would be a wrong to both of us infinitely greater. I owe you an expiation; your release is all I can offer, and it is insufficient. I can only plead that I was deaf and blind. By some miracle, I cannot tell how, my ears and eyes are opened, and I hear and see. It is not the first time in my life that the truth has been revealed to me suddenly, supernaturally, I may say, as if in a vision, and I know the revelation is authentic.⁸⁶

Two months later Madge reveals to her mother that she is pregnant. When Mrs. Hopgood concludes that Frank has abandoned Madge, her daughter makes it clear that she does not want the marriage. Fortunately, Mrs. Hopgood also is an "enlightened" woman, and she assures Madge that she will stand by her.

They move to London. After the novelty of their new environment has worn off, Madge suffers from melancholy, deepened by the knowledge of the suffering she has caused her mother and sister. (The author points out that if she had held to the common creed, Madge would have been too much concerned with the welfare of her own soul to worry about the sufferings of others.)

Before the child is born, Mrs. Hopgood dies of an illness brought on when their landlady, scandalized by Madge's condition, forced them to move in bad weather. Clara and Madge, left without an adequate income, are alone in the strange city.

Madge undergoes a series of temptations presented by people who love her. Frank, who has been unhappy, partly because he fears his conduct will be discovered, one day meets Madge in St. Paul's, where he begs her again to marry him. She is almost persuaded to consent, but recognizes again that her feeling is not love and his is determined in part by duty. To his proposal she replies that such a marriage would be a crime. Clara adds her persuasion by reminding her sister, "'Frank loved you, Madge.'" But Madge is ready with a Biblical paraphrase, "'Clara, Clara, you know not what you do! For God's sake forbear!'"⁸⁷

Even their kindly new landlady, Mrs. Caffyn, has difficulty understanding why Madge does not marry the father of her child. "'Don't you think, my dear, if there's nothing atwixt you, as it was a flyin' in the face of Providence to turn him off? You were regularly engaged to him, and I have heard you say he was very fond of you.'"⁸⁸

Left to herself, Madge muses on the relationship. She has no aversions to Frank; their affections for each other could

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 172-173.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 193-194.

suffice for an average marriage. But the author makes it clear that in his opinion Madge gains a victory by refusing a marriage such as that. "Nevertheless, in a few minutes, her enemies had vanished, like a mist before a sudden wind, and she was once more victorious."⁸⁹

One day, long after the birth of her child, Madge meets the Jewish instrument maker whom her sister met at the bookshop where she works. About Baruch Cohen, the author says:

In his ethics and system of life, as well as in his religion, there was the same intolerance of multiplicity which was not reducible to unity. He seldom explained his theory, but everybody who knew him recognized the difference which it wrought between him and other men. There was a certain concord in everything he said and did, as if it were directed by some enthroned and secret principle.⁹⁰

This is the man whom Madge marries and of whom the author obviously approves. When Madge tries to bring up the subject of her past, he makes no reply but embraces her instead, thereby affirming that this aspect of her life is not worth discussing. The action agrees with White's thesis: his free thinker is the truly noble man, or woman.

Clearly White's concern with Madge Hopgood is less with her role as an unwed mother in 1844 than as a vehicle for his ideas. Another writer would have made much more of her suffering, the disgrace to her family, and the cruelty of society.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 197.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 181.

White is mainly interested in showing how an advanced young woman defies sham morality and custom and how she finds happiness with a person as unconventional as she. Actually, his heroine would appear more at home in 1896, when many old ideas were being challenged, than in 1844. Madge does not think or speak or act as the reader expects a woman of that period to have done.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A study of the fallen women who appear in novels published between 1870 and 1900 reveals a trend away from what is usually regarded as the conventional treatment, which can still be seen in an 1870 novel by Trollope, toward the bolder, more realistic approach which is illustrated by George Moore in Evelyn Innes and its sequel, Sister Teresa, at the very end of this thirty-year period. It is necessary, of course, to beware of suggesting that all reactions to and all rebellions against restrictions in the English novel took place during these years. To do so would be to impose a category that the preceding survey denies.

The novels referred to, The Vicar of Bullhampton and Evelyn Innes, illustrate exceptionally well one of the main differences between the "conventional" and the "new" treatment of fallen women. Trollope's Carry Brattle is presented with such reticence that the punishment meted out to her seems out of proportion to the misdeed. What attractions the officer had, what desires Carry struggled with, the reader does not learn. He does know what the author thinks, which is that such a girl has spoiled her life and must be made an example for others. George

Moore, on the other hand, brings both the man and the woman clearly into the limelight and examines the urges and drives that motivate them. He tells frankly what happens, employing a method that dispenses with breathless hints and discreet veillings. Unlike Victorian novelists at their most characteristic function, Moore avoids stepping into the novel to condemn his heroine or her partners. He refrains also from administering stock rewards or punishments.

Most of the writers between 1870 and 1900 fall somewhere between these two extremes. With the exception of Hardy, they continue to skirt the subjects of passion, sexual jealousy, frigidity. The sexual adventures of Collins's prostitutes, as well as those of Gissing, go unmentioned. The illicit romances in the novels of Mrs. Schreiner and Mrs. Ward, while presented in the context of advanced thought, are not more realistically presented than those in Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell. Apart from this, writers do show a tendency to focus attention more steadily on their fallen women, with the result that some memorable figures emerge in the works of Hardy, Gissing, and Meredith, in addition to Moore. Less moral censure accompanies the more careful study of a character who may even be presented as an admirable person, as witness Tess, or Ida Starr, or Esther Waters.

Partly as the result of the franker treatment, partly because of the ferment of the times, fallen women begin to emerge

as rebels and protagonists. Ida Starr defies society's classification of such as she; Aminta Farrell rebels against her marriage vows; Sue Bridehead is in revolt against conventional ways of regulating the conduct of men and women. Some of them become their authors' mouthpieces, speaking and living the theories of their creators. They are no longer hapless victims, but protagonists deliberately choosing a course that will lead them into difficulties and/or eventually to happiness. Most of them have no time to bewail their state but exhibit fortitude and endurance under varying circumstances. Victims, when they occur, are as often the pawn of inscrutable forces as the prey of heartless seducers.

While treatments and portraits of fallen women change, the themes of their stories change also. The old favorite, that the wages of sin is death or misery, finds much less currency. Death, when it comes, need not be interpreted as the automatic punishment for immorality. Even happy endings are possible for Aminta Farrell and Madge Hopgood, and for prostitutes who marry good men. (Not always, of course, as Workers in the Dawn testifies.)

Man's inhumanity to man, while still a theme with Collins and Trollope in the 1870's, has less vogue in the following decades. Its use had always assured a good supply of pathos in earlier novels, but it was an element which the realistic and naturalistic writers preferred to do without. There is now an

increase of stories in which women find help in rehabilitating themselves, or in which their status is not much damaged by their illioit affairs.

Almost entirely absent is the idea that technical loss of chastity ruins a woman for life. True, it is accepted unquestioningly in Trollope's two novels, and is the source of Tess's misery, but it is openly challenged by Ida Starr and ignored as an important subject in other novels. The emphasis once given to it is now directed to other matters relating to the position of women: criticism of the double standard, incompatible marriages, woman's inferior position, rigors of marriage laws, her boredom. A number of the new fallen women appear in the context of novels dealing with religious skepticism, in which doubt in matters of belief is accompanied by questions regarding standards of morality and decorum. The changing role of women is reflected also in novels with radical political theories, such as those by Grant Allen and William Hale White.

Writers like Meredith and Moore, who were aware of the novel as an art form, show most independence of the clichés and trappings that so often marked the stories that featured fallen women. Other novelists, too, during the last decades of the century begin to dispense with obvious vice and virtue contrasts, with villainous seducers, and unrelenting parents; but unfortunately, the effort that might have gone into psychological study of characters has too often been diverted to propaganda

of one kind or another.

In summary then, it may be pointed out that several English novelists from 1870 to 1900 made real advances in the portrayal of fallen women when they brought their subjects under close scrutiny and abandoned stock methods of treating them. While there was no return to the frankness of Defoe and Fielding, there was increasing disregard of earlier taboos and restrictions that would lead to great freedom of expression in the next century.

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Approval Sheet

The dissertation submitted by Gerda Bos has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Feb. 17, 1965
Date

Jane A. Barry
Signature of Adviser